

Arthur Villette Esq.



His Maj.^{ty} Minister
to Switzerland.

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The PROTESTANT SYSTEM:
CONTAINING *K*
DISCOURSES
ON THE
PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES
OF
NATURAL and REVEALED RELIGION.

Compiled from the
WORKS of the following PROTESTANT
DISSENTERS, viz.

ABERNETHY,
AMORY,
BARKER,
BENSON,
BULKELEY,
CHANDLER,
DODDRIDGE,
DUCHAL,
EMLYN,

FORDYCE,
FOSTER,
GROVE,
HOLLAND,
LEECHMAN,
MASON,
MORRIS,
NEWMAN, &c. &c.

To which are added,

FOUR DISCOURSES never before printed.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N:

Printed for R. GRIFFITHS, at the Dunciad, in Pater-noster Row.

MDCCCLVIII.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE editor's design in this collection was to present the public with a series of Discourses on the principal doctrines both of natural and revealed religion. And as just and honourable sentiments concerning the Divine Nature and Perfections are of the utmost importance in every enquiry wherein religion is concerned, he has introduced his collection with several of ABERNETHY's Discourses on the Being and Perfections of God, which, for solidity of argument, strength and clearness of reasoning, and justness of sentiment, are equal, if not superior, to any thing of the kind in the *English* language.

THE Discourses on the Divine Perfections are immediately followed by others on *the immutable difference between moral good and evil, Providence, a future state, and the moral government of God*; all containing, in the editor's opinion, clear and rational views of these important and most interesting subjects.

IN the discourses which follow those upon the several branches of natural religion, the evidences,

ADVERTISEMENT.

dences, and principal doctrines of Christianity, the right of private judgment, with several other useful subjects of a practical nature, are treated of. Throughout the whole work, the editor has endeavoured to consult the interests of manly, rational piety, and of free enquiry; and has inserted nothing that has, in his opinion, the least tendency to inflame a party-spirit, or to favour the cause of bigotry and enthusiasm. His collection, therefore, he hopes, will be read with pleasure and advantage by every consistent protestant, by every one who is desirous of building his faith and practice upon a rational and solid foundation: as for narrow bigots and wild enthusiasts, they will find nothing in it that can give them any pleasure, nor did the editor ever intend they should.

N. B. The four new Sermons, mentioned in the title-page, are those by Mr. **FOR-
DYCE**, Mr. **MASON**, Mr. **GRIGG**, and
Mr. **CLARK**.

In the discourses which follow those upon the several branches of natural religion, the evidences

DISCOURSE I.

The Being of God proved from the
Frame of the Material World.

[ABERNETHY.]

ROM. i. 19, 20.

Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.

THE mind of man, by attending to its own constitution, and to the state and appearances of the world, is naturally led to an inquiry concerning the origin and causes of things, the proper measures of its own conduct, with the consequences of them, and to future events as far as it can attain the knowledge of them; that is, to an inquiry concerning God and religion. When a man, endued with all the vital, sensitive, and intellectual powers which belong to his nature, and arrived at the perfect exercise of them, with a competent knowledge of himself, and the various relations and uses of things about him; when, I say, he deliberately views the obvious face of nature; when he beholds the vast expanse of heaven, the glorious light of the sun, and by it a num-
VOL. I. B berless

berless multitude of other objects, many of which,
 he knows, by his senses, his appetites, his affections
 and experience, are in different ways useful to him
 and to each other; reflecting at the same time on his
 own being, his various powers and perceptions,
 one would think he could scarcely avoid such enquiries
 as these, — “ Whence am I, and by what power
 “ produc’d? Whence all these beings with which
 “ I see myself surrounded? As I have no other
 “ knowledge of my existence, nor any other way to
 “ judge of its duration, than by conscious perception,
 “ I must conclude, that some time ago I was not, for
 “ I had no consciousness nor perception of any thing.
 “ How then is this wonderful transition from non-
 “ existence into being to be accounted for? Is it to
 “ be attributed to a superior designing cause? and
 “ has that same mighty intelligent cause form’d all
 “ those other beings I perceive, which by their ap-
 “ pearances seem to be related to each other and to
 “ me, so as to make up one intire system? But now
 “ that I find myself in such a situation, what am I to
 “ do? There are instincts in my nature, which
 “ prompt me to various actions and enjoyments;
 “ I am furnished with the instruments of sen-
 “ sation and motion; I see, and hear, and taste,
 “ and smell, and feel? I can move the organs of my
 “ own body, and by them some other bodies, merely
 “ by an act of my own will, or the voluntary exer-
 “ tion of an inward self-determining power; I have
 “ hunger and thirst at certain returning seasons, and
 “ am readily supplied with meat and drink, whereby
 “ this body is nourish’d and sensibly refresh’d. This
 “ is common with me to a multitude of living things
 “ in different shapes, with which the earth is stor’d;
 “ but I find in myself the powers of reason and higher
 “ affections, whereof *they* give no discovery, which
 “ leads me to conclude there is a nobler end of my
 “ being, and I am capable of a greater happiness.
 “ I can reflect, compare my own perceptions of things,
 “ and

“ and inquire into their origin and tendencies; I perceive at first view some truths, and they give me pleasure; I investigate others by a deliberate attention to my own ideas, and to their agreement and relations, still with a growing satisfaction; I am conscious of liberty or a freedom of choice, and the ideas of right and wrong in action, naturally occur to me; I must therefore be directed in my conduct by a regard to that difference; I find benevolence to sensitive beings, especially those of my own kind, naturally arise in my mind, together with reverence and gratitude to a superior nature, the supposed author of my existence and of all my enjoyments; which affections, as they are reflected on with delightful self-approbation, a more excellent enjoyment than any sensible object can yield; so they are accompanied with a desire to please that superior Being, and be approved by him. But how shall I continue possess'd of existence, with all the variety of enjoyment that belongs to it, which is so very desirable? And since experience convinces me that the present life is frail, and has in it a mixture of unhappiness, what prospect have I of a future state, (for the thoughts of falling again into nothing fill my mind with horror;) and how shall I attain to the highest perfection I am capable of? For it plainly appears that, at least, the nobler powers of my nature may admit of a more various exercise than the present, and a further improvement. All that is possible for me to do, as an intelligent agent, whereby I may contribute to my own happiness, and answer the end of my being, is to follow the guidance of my own reason and what nature points to, considering the whole of my constitution, and preserving the just subordination of its lower, to its superior parts: and for the continuance of my being, and what additional felicity, I may desire or expect, I must hope in the same supreme power

“and goodness, to which I owe all that is now in my possession.”

If these are the inquiries and the sentiments which the mind of man, unbiass'd by any prejudices or prepossessions, would naturally fall into; (and whether they are or not, let any one judge, who carefully attends even to the most obvious appearances in the human constitution,) we may consider whether they are not very becoming us. It is true we grow up to the exercise of our reason gradually; the first part of life is pass'd over with very little reflection; the world is become familiar to us; we have learned the use of things, and opinions concerning them, which engage our assent and our affections, before we come to that maturity of understanding which is necessary to qualify us for a thorough and rational examination. But neither the familiarity contracted with our own existence and the world, (we cannot but be sensible, that our knowledge of both is of no long standing,) nor any prejudice we may have received in a childish immature state, should divert us, when we have attained to the full use of our reason, from attending such important inquiries, which the least self-reflection will shew to be every way worthy of men. Whether our inquiries will rationally end in religion, founded on the belief of a Deity, is what I am now to consider. This, however, seems to be the plainest and most natural way of attaining satisfaction in that great point: For by the Deity we mean the powerful, wise and good parent of mankind, the maker, preserver, and ruler, of the world; and how shall we know him but by the characters of his perfections stamp'd upon his works? Thus the apostle argues in my text, *That which may be known of God is manifest to men, for God hath shewed it unto them* (by their own reason.) *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.*

It is certain, the belief of a Deity has generally obtained among mankind. Excepting the objects of the mind's immediate intuition and of sense, concerning which there can be no dispute; excepting these, I say, perhaps there is not any one point to which Men have more universally given an explicit assent, than the Being of God. This is thought, by some, to be a strong presumption in its favour; for they alledge, nothing but the clear irrefragable evidence of truth could have induced all nations of the world to agree in it. As to vulgar opinions, acknowledged to be erroneous in other points, such as the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies, the case is very different; for there the error plainly arises from inattention, and forming a judgment too hastily upon the report of sense, concerning appearances which it cannot examine. But in such a point of speculation as the existence of the Deity, to the knowledge of which we are led by our own most obvious reflections, and which the more it is attended to, the more firmly it is believed; an uniform agreement seems to proceed from the voice of nature, or God himself speaking intelligibly to every nation by his works. There is, undoubtedly, in the human mind, a knowledge of things which are not the objects of sense, nay in many instances reason corrects sense, and discovers its mistakes: indeed, the greatest certainty we have is in the clear perception of an agreement between our own abstract ideas; so that a concurring persuasion concerning propositions formed of such ideas, and concerning rational deductions from them, has the best appearance of being founded on truth, because in them men are least obnoxious to deception.

There have been however some, very few of mankind in comparison, who have professedly denied the being of God, and pretended to account for the formation of the world, and all the phænomena of nature, without Him. These men ridicule the common belief as superstitious, proceeding wholly from igno-

rance of causes, political fiction, customary tradition, or the passion of fear, which often produces groundless imaginations. I may afterwards have occasion to examine these pretences. In the mean time, without resting this first principle of all religion on the presumption in its favour, taken from the general consent of mankind, or any other presumptions, however strong, I shall proceed directly to establish it by clear evidence of reason, in the method which appears to me the most simple and natural. Only let it be observed,

That the notions of men, concerning the Deity and his attributes, have been very confused, and their opinions widely different, even *theirs* who agree in the professed belief of his Being: Some have declared themselves unable to form any idea of substance distinct from body; and therefore concluded, that as the human soul is only a subtile kind of matter, or a particular modification of it, so God himself is corporeal. This way of thinking, though very gross, is plainly discovered in the writings of the celebrated *stoic* philosophers, mixt at the same time with noble sentiments, concerning the Divine moral perfections and providence. Some conceived that the creation of material substance was absolutely impossible, though it is intirely subject to the disposal of active intelligence; and that therefore it must be coeval with the supreme Being, whom they imagined to be the eternal soul of an eternal universe. Others seem to have denied the unity of the Godhead, at least, they divided their worship among a plurality of divine beings, so called; though it is probable, the Polytheism of the Gentiles is to be understood, concerning a multiplicity of inferior agents in the Divine administration, or ministring spirits, all subject to the one Supreme. Others again, have so perplexed the doctrine of the Divine eternity and immensity, as to render them unintelligible. But above all, the errors concerning the moral perfections, as they

they are most pernicious, have been the most frequent in the world, the *Christian* world itself not altogether excepted. Not to mention the Gods of *Epicurus*, which he imagined, or pretended to have imagined, to be a kind of indolent happy things, neither the makers nor rulers of any thing, but like other beings, made out of atoms by accident: I say, pretended to have imagined; for it is not unlikely that part of his scheme was a complement to the religion of mankind, or rather a sneer, such as is not unusual with writers of his sort. The heathens had, many of them, very absurd conceptions of the morals of their inferior gods; and *Jupiter* himself was far from being perfectly pure and good. There are, even among those who have the best means of instruction, very gross opinions, and of a dangerous tendency, concerning the justice and goodness of God, and the measures of his government over moral agents; which it is needless now to insist on more particularly.

The use I shall make at present of this observation, is, to avoid at our entrance on this subject, a particular definition of the Deity, by enumerating all the perfections, which I hope we shall in the sequel, see reason to attribute to him, because the present controversy is only with *Atheists*, not with any, even of the most imperfect *Theists*. Besides, I think, in such an inquiry, we ought to begin with the plainest principles, that having once seen them established with clear evidence, we may then proceed to points less obvious. Thus, if it first appears by convincing proof, that there is an intelligent designing cause in the universe, to which the order and appearances of it are to be ascribed, we may hence take our rise to the consideration of the characters of that cause, and so by degrees advance to the most compleat notion of God which we can form.

I shall therefore consider the subject before us in the simplest view, and begin with an inquiry into the true

cause of the visible frame of nature, stating the question, as it thus plainly stands between us and our adversaries, Whether the material world, with its principal and most obvious phænomena which fall under our observation, is formed and guided by mere chance, or blind necessity, (which are the different hypotheses of *Atheism*) and I shall examine them severally: or if, on the contrary, it was produced by, and is under the direction of an active, understanding, and intending Cause?

In order to this, let us first consider the ideas of intelligence and activity, of cause and effect, and of necessity and chance, which arise in our minds, by attending to what passes in them, and by observing what our senses inform us of, in the ordinary course of things. Perception is always and necessarily accompanied with consciousness. That a man sees and hears, and remembers and understands, and reasons, and desires and wills, needs no proof to him, nor indeed is capable of any; nothing being so evident to his mind, not the very existence of any thing without him; nor is it possible, without consciousness, to convince a man of any operation or perception in his own mind. Our agency, from an inward self-determining principle, is as well known to us, as our passive perceptions are: as we cannot help seeing, hearing, perceiving pleasure upon some occasions, and pain upon others, whether external or internal; we are as sensible that we can, without a consciousness of any necessity impelling, turn our attention to one object in preference to another; we can recal the ideas which have been formerly in our minds; we can variously associate them, compare and examine their relations to each other; conscious that these operations do not arise from without, but depend wholly upon ourselves; and we are equally sensible, that some corporeal motions proceed from the determination of our own wills. Our bodies begin to move, or particular members of them; some other bodies also are moved by their
force;

force; and all such motions are continued or stoppt, while we are not conscious of any thing whereby either the continuance or cessation are produced, but our own simple volitions.

Hence arise the notions of free or voluntary agency, and necessity as distinguished from it, and of cause and effect. Such powers as we find in ourselves, we can easily conceive to belong to other Beings, either in a greater or lesser degree. As we have clear evidence of perception and spontaneous motions in other animals, tho' different in kind from, and both of them much more confined than, ours; so there is no difficulty in apprehending that there may be intelligence of a much larger comprehension than the human, and a more extensive activity, producing more numerous, and vastly greater effects.

We have at the same time the idea of what is called passive power, or, a capacity of being moved and changed: for we can move our own bodies, and alter the situation, the external form, and the sensible qualities, of other bodies, by the use of proper means, which we have learned by observation and experience. And these bodies we find to be constantly and uniformly liable to the same, or the like alterations, by active force. Whatever appearance there is of action in this sort of beings, will be found upon closer attention, to be really no action at all. A man can easily distinguish between walking, and being carried; between the involuntary motion of his hand, and that which depends solely upon the command of his own will: in the one, he is an agent, in the other wholly passive. In like manner, a stone falling, (which we do not conceive to move from an internal principle, because no power of self-motion ever appears in that kind of being,) is no more active than the earth on which it makes an impression, or the human body which it bruises, occasioning a sensation of pain: and for other corporeal action, so called, producing various and considerable effects, such as that of fire and
air,

air, it can only be attributed to the intestine motion, not spontaneous, of more subtile material parts; and therefore is no more properly action than the motion of intire solid bodies, whose parts are at rest among themselves, that is, do not at all change their situation with respect to each other.

Thus we are led to distinguish between the positive ideas of blind necessity and intelligent activity, as directly opposite to each other, the one belonging to a cause, the other to an effect. Indeed the negative idea of necessary existence is not self-contradictory, no more than that of infinity. But to say that unintelligent necessity operates, must, I think, appear to our minds to be a contradiction in terms: it is to assert operation, and at the same time deny it in a proper sense, and to destroy the very notion of activity, which yet we know as clearly as we do our own existence, being equally conscious of it. There may be, 'tis true, a train of necessary effects, as in the instance of motion communicated to various inanimate bodies, one impelling another successively; and the prior has the appearance of causing the posterior: but really they are alike passive; and to imagine that they operate, is to confound the most inconsistent notions of acting and being acted upon. And as thus the ideas of cause and effect, of active and passive power, of agency and necessity, take their rise from an attention to ourselves, our own minds and our bodies; so we cannot avoid observing the same difference among all other beings which we know. I have not indeed the same intuitive knowledge of another man's conscious activity, as I have of my own, but yet I have such evidence of it, as excludes all doubt: nor can I question, but that the earth I walk on, the pen I hold in my hand, and other instruments of action which I use, are passive inanimate things, always yielding to force, and never discovering the least sign of an inward self-determining principle. This distinction runs through the whole universe, as far as we are acquainted

acquainted with it; and all the knowledge we have of being, our own or any other, leads us to discern the essential irreconcilable contrariety of spontaneous acting, to blind necessity. It follows, that if there be any things or appearances, which we judge to be effects in the world, (and who can help observing a multitude of them?) to attribute them to unintelligent necessity, is to attribute them to what we can have no notion of as a cause at all; and to say that such necessity is universal, is to say there is not, nor can be any such thing as a cause, or it is to deny the possibility of action.

It is still to be remembered, that the necessity here spoken of, is only such as excludes intelligence and design: the question concerning necessary agency in another sense, that is, whether an intelligent agent acts so necessarily, that it is impossible in the event he should act otherwise than he does, whatever the reason be;--this question, I say, is intirely different, and not concerned in the controversy with *Atheists*. For supposing it to be determined in the affirmative, still it leaves us the idea of intelligent active power, as a proper cause producing effects; and, with respect to the formation and order of the universe, the idea of an intelligent active power equal to the production of such an effect; which is what we mean by the Deity. But to attribute operation to undesigning necessity, is to attribute it to an abstract notion, and to confound all our ideas of cause and effect. And how can a man, who is as fully convinced of active power in himself, as of his own existence, and in the same manner, that is, by being conscious of it, reason with him who denies the being, and even the possibility of such a power? And how absurd an assertion must it appear, that nothing at all, not the least being in nature, nor any mode or quality, not so much as the least motion, could possibly (by an antecedent necessity, independant on design,) have been otherwise than it is? Can a man believe this, who sees such marks of indifferency

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rency in a multitude of things, so many changes in the face of nature, and knows that so many depend on his own choice?

The notion of chance, so far as it relates to the present subject, arises wholly from men's ignorance of causes. As we see very often in the world many changeable appearances, which by the novelty, variety, and other circumstances of them, we can't help believing to be effects, but not being particularly determined by any necessity, nor yet by the intention of any agent which we can observe, the word chance is substituted in the place of the unknown cause. And this may be sufficient for some purposes, for which the knowledge of causes is of no importance. But in an inquiry concerning the origin of things, to apply chance as a kind of hypothesis to solve the appearances of natures, and account for the order of the world, is evidently absurd. For the word so applied, can have no other signification than ignorance, or nothing at all; tho' in some men's minds, at least in their manner of expressing themselves, there seem to be utterly inconsistent ideas confusedly jumbled together, as the signification of it. For they seem to imagine a kind of efficiency at the same time that there is no certain determinate cause, (which it is impossible for them to know;) that is, they most absurdly attribute a real uncertain efficiency, to nothing, to an empty sound, or a vague undetermined notion; when, if they would examine their thoughts, they would find that the true meaning of chance is only, we don't know what.

Thus we see the *Atheistic* schemes concerning the formation of the world, its order and appearances, instead of giving a rational, intelligible account, are founded only in ignorance, and indeed are everfive of true human knowledge. The one of them (*Necessity*) destroys the very idea of intelligent and designing activity, which is as clear to our minds as any idea can be, being perceived by an inward consciousness; the

the other (*Chance*) is an utter absurdity, made up of inconsistent notions, and really meaning nothing but ignorance.

But I will not content myself with arguing thus against the hypothesis of the *Atheists* in general. Let us allow more than they have any pretence in reason to demand: let us suppose necessity to stand for something, whose operation is like that of material causes, (improperly so called,) which effect appearances by an undirected impulse, or without the interposition of any design. A constant uniformity however, must be included in the idea of such operation: for necessity, whether it be applied to existence, power, or whatever else, admits of no change, no interruption, no variety either in kind or degree. And let chance, however inconsistently, be supposed to be something, we don't know what, which operates, but its operation is not determined, either by a natural necessity, or by counsel. Now, if neither of these hypotheses, (between which *Atheists* have been divided, some chusing the one, some the other, and a different *Atheistical* hypothesis never has been, nor can be devised; but) if, I say, neither of them can reasonably be admitted in accounting for the being and disposition of things, as in fact they appear, there is then nothing left to rest in, but the contrivance and agency of an intelligent cause. But that neither of these hypotheses does answer the professed design, *viz.* to explain the formation and order of the world, I shall endeavour to shew clearly, from the common appearances, which cannot possibly have escaped the most careless observer. Whatever way we turn our eyes, to whatever part of the universe, or the whole of it which is visible to us, the face of nature has these two characters, which no one can help observing; it is various, and it is uniform; the former is a convincing argument against necessity, and the latter against chance.

First, there appears in the visible frame of nature, a great variety. When we look up to the heavens
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in the day, our sight, piercing through a thin pellucid medium, terminates in a vast azure concave, without any diversity; only that we see in it a great luminous fiery globe, which we conclude to be the fountain of light; and sometimes interposed clouds, which by observation and reason, we know to be only watery exhalations from the earth gathered together in a region not far distant from us, and when they are condensed, falling down again in rain; but when we turn our eyes the same way at night, the prospect is quite changed, and a new scene presented to us. The great ruling luminary of the day is withdrawn, and in his stead there are seen numberless lesser lights; among them, one larger than the rest, with various appearance, conspicuous, but pale, and shining with a faint and borrowed lustre. This is the constantly changing appearance of the heavens in every diurnal revolution; besides other periodical alterations in the course of the sun and the moon, which every one must observe. In our own globe, which our eyes can more accurately survey, there appears a much greater diversity;—a vast collection of waters, supplied by perpetual currents, dispersed in several channels, continually flowing into it;—on the solid part where we live, here mountains and rocks, there plains and valleys; in one place stately groves, in another flowery meadows, or fields covered with corn, all stocked with numerous inhabitants; the sea stored with fishes of surprizingly various shapes and sizes, the dry land with as great a diversity of beasts, and the air with fowls. I do not speak now of the mutual relations of these things, the suitableness of one to another, and the convenient regular disposition of all, which must strike an attentive mind with a sense of natural beauty in the whole, and lead it to the acknowledgment of wisdom and goodness in the author; but upon the most indifferent superficial view, which presents to us such an amazing variety, and without looking narrowly

narrowly into the composition of particular beings, which greatly increases it, let any man think, if he can, that blind, undesigned necessity has produced such a multiform appearance. The operation of necessary causes, if they must be called causes, is always alike, and admits of no changes. The mechanical powers of springs, weights and wheels, and other instruments of motion, are exerted uniformly. Fire is another necessary corporeal agent, which operates always in the same manner, though it has different effects, according to the different texture of the bodies into which it penetrates, causing some parts to ascend in smoke and flame, reducing some to ashes, and making some liquid or malleable. To give these and such like instruments, that diversity of operation, which is necessary to answer even the low purposes of human art, and the conveniencies of human life, there must be, we know, a superior intending Cause, to guide the application of them: but that such necessary causes, as senseless atoms, should, out of themselves, without any skill in the application of their force, or the interposal of any intelligent direction, produce such a wonderful variety as there is in the visible appearance of the world,—the liquid waters, and the more fluid air of a different constitution; the strangely subtle and penetrating light; the solid earth, and the firmer rocks; the almost infinite kinds of vegetables, diverse in shape, colour, flower, and fruit; not only the many species of animals and the numberless individuals, each intire, but the yet more various parts of their composition, the solid and the fluid, the organs of motion and sensation;—this is such a paradox, it must be an understanding of a very odd make, that can believe it.

The *Atheist* may next betake himself to chance, which is capricious enough, and variable, to answer the greatest imaginable or possible diversity of productions, if it be admitted to have any share in them.. Necessity is limited, and must always produce exactly

actly similar and unvarying effects; but fickle chance is tied down to no rule of operation, if it can operate at all. Supposing it to determine the existence, and the order of things, what should hinder the diversity which there is in the world, nay, an infinitely greater diversity? Why may not water, and air, and light, and rocks, and animals, and vegetables, all kinds of substances, and all possible qualities, be jumbled together? But as the variety which there is in the appearances of nature, is an invincible argument against their being the production of necessary causes, an equally strong objection lies against the hypothesis of chance, namely, their uniformity. Every one must be sensible, that *this* is as truly the character of the face of nature, as the *other*. Whenever we turn our eyes to the heavens, they have the same uniform aspect as when we viewed them before; the sun and the moon, and the stars, hold their places, and go on constantly in their course, producing a regular succession of day and night, summer and winter: one would think *they continue after an ordinance*, and are subject to a law, rather than guided by giddy hazard. In our lower world, not only *the hills are everlasting*, and the *rocks not removed out of their place*; but the waters, however easily yielding to force, keep their perpetual channels; and the whole self-balanced globe hangs in loose fluid air, which has no strength to support it. The tender herbs, which seem to die every winter, revive again in the spring, and cover the earth with a renewed verdure. The living things of so brittle a frame and short-lived, yet do not quite disappear and give way to different kinds, which being equally possible, have an equal chance for production, if chance ruled, but the same species are perpetuated in a constant succession. If this argument were pursued more minutely, it would still appear the stronger. If we do not take the works of nature in the gross, and content ourselves with a bare view of their outsides, but examine their

their interior constitution, the evidence against hazard in their formation will still increase; for it must be plain to every one, that the more complicated any pieces of work, machines or systems are, design is still the more apparent in their similarity. But the most obvious view is sufficient to our purpose. For let any man consider whether he would not make a difference between heaps of sand and stones huddled together in confusion, and a regular building; between a fortuitous jumble of pieces of brass, iron, and lead, and a well going clock; between a mob, or a tumultuous assembly of men without any order, and a well formed political society, or a well disciplined army; let him consider, I say, whether he would not make a difference in these cases, presuming there was counsel and design in some, but not in others. And now, if we apply the same reasoning to the works of nature, whereas, upon the supposition of chance, there is infinite to one against any certain determined production, (for chance ranges unguided, to the utmost verge of possibility, when in fact, we see amidst an almost infinite variety of things, there is such an obvious constant uniformity in the appearances of the world,) is it not surprizing, that it should ever have entered into the mind of any man, to exclude design, and attribute all to chance?

The argument, so far as we have proceeded, seems to be fully conclusive, and we may confidently rest in it as proved, that neither the hypothesis of chance, nor of undesigning necessity, can account for the appearances of the universe. But we shall be more directly convinced that there is manifested intelligence and design in the frame of the mundane system, if in the next place we consider what the antients called τὸ ἐν καὶ καλῶς, the beautiful and harmonious, the regular and convenient, the amiable and good, with which the world every where abounds. This point admits of a large illustration, all the discoveries which have been made in astronomy, natural philo-

sophy, and natural history, tending to shew that there is a fitness in things, a correspondence in the parts of the world, one answering to another so as to demonstrate wise contrivance, and unity of design in the whole. There is not one region of the universe of which we have any knowledge, the heavens, the air, the earth, or the sea, not one intire particular being which we have the means of inquiring narrowly into, one fish, one fowl, one beast or one tree; there is not one of all these that does not appear to be artificially made, and does not by the exact proportion and harmony of its parts, discover design in the whole of its constitution. And indeed, in these last ages particularly, men of leisure and penetration have so happily employed their time and their understandings in the study of nature, as to set the argument in a very clear light, proving beyond all rational contradiction, the wisdom and goodness of God in his works, to the utter confusion of those who are either so stupidly blind or obstinately wicked as not to regard the operation of his hands.

But I shall only insist on those things which every understanding must discern, the appearances which every eye sees, or the observations of fact which must occur to the most unattentive of mankind, who has but common sense; for even *they* will be sufficient to establish this great truth upon. Let us first consider the visible world at large, as it appears to a naked eye, and to a plain, unimproved understanding. No man of the meanest capacity, and the lowest way of thinking, can be ignorant that there is a relation between the parts of the universe; that from the sun there is a communication of light and heat to the earth, which is the apparent cause of the various productions upon its surface, and of so manifold use to its inhabitants, that they could not subsist without it. By that genial warmth tender plants of different kinds spring up from small seeds, and are nourished, some into str ng stalks, some into low shrubs, and some into

into stately trees, all bearing fruits which are the food of animals: and among animals there is an order and mutual usefulness, the other kinds being in subordination to man, who, by the prerogative of his superior nature, claims a dominion over their labours and their lives. To man particularly, and to other living things proportionably to the lower purposes of their being, the light of the sun is so comfortable and so useful, that we cannot conceive how the ends of a life, constituted as ours is, could be answered, and its conveniencies obtained, without it. But that light, and the nourishing heat with which it is accompanied, is so conveniently distributed, as in the best manner to illuminate and animate the whole earth, the globular figure of which requires a diurnal rotation, that all the dwellers on it may be supplied in their turns; nor do any of them, especially not the principal, suffer by the darkness they are overspread with, whilst the sun visits others with his benign influences; for night gives man a necessary vacation from the labours of the day. But no one can avoid observing the changes of the seasons, occasioned by the annual (apparent) course of the sun. If he kept one perpetual track, the greatest part of the earth must be uninhabited, either by reason of excessive heat or cold; the gloomy regions never visited by him, must be shut up in continual darkness and impenetrable frost, while the climates on which his beams should still directly fall, must be quite burnt up, yielding no sustenance for man or beast. But instead of these extremes, how commodiously is this great benefit dispensed, by the fixed periodical revolution of the great orb in a yearly course, so directed, as to prevent, as far as can be, the excesses both of heat and cold, and produce the grateful and useful variety of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Again, if we take but even a slight view of this lower world itself, we shall see an admirable correspondence between its parts; however different they are, yet every

one fitted to another, and to all the rest, so as to make the whole a convenient dwelling-place for the several tribes of animals which live upon it, and for mankind especially. The solid earth supports our heavy bodies; the thin air we breathe, is absolutely necessary to our preservation; and no one can be ignorant of how manifold use water is, not only more remotely, by serving the purposes of vegetation, but by the immediate refreshment it gives, and as a means of the decent and comfortable enjoyment of life. Every element has its proper inhabitants, which by the peculiar make and organization of their bodies, are adapted to it: The fishes have fins, the land animals feet and legs, and even the groveling reptile is furnished with the proper instruments of its slow motion: All these so various, that the kinds of them can scarcely be numbered, have food convenient for them, and every thing which is suitable to their several natures.

Now, even upon this general imperfect view, let any man judge whether there be not clear evidence of contrivance and design in the formation of our world; indeed, whether it does not appear such a regular connected system, as considering the infinite variety of its parts, all of them so exquisitely fitted to each other, and disposed in such exact order, as to make a perfect harmony in the whole; whether, I say, considering this, any understanding less than infinite, could have formed the model? This is so plain, I do not think it needful to use many words in illustrating it. The truth is, I cannot help concluding, that without the most unaccountable infatuation, or perverseness, every one must acknowledge it. Surely it would be far less absurd to imagine, that the most curious machine ever framed by human art, the most beautiful edifice, the finest picture, or the most delightful musical harmony; — that these, any, or all of them, made themselves by a merely casual mixture of their parts, than that

this

this stupendous and most artificial fabric of the universe, arose from nothing, or from rude, utterly indisposed materials, by undirected necessity or hazard.

Before we proceed any further, let us stop here to make one obvious reflection, or rather indulge ourselves in those thoughts which will naturally arise. The human mind is so constituted, as to have a pleasing sense of beauty, in order, proportion, and harmony, particularly, as it is thereby led to apprehend wisdom and good design in the contrivance. It is this which affords so various and delightful entertainment, from the curious productions of the artist's hand, but first of his mind. One admires statuary, another architecture, another gardening, others are delighted with the compositions which are merely the work of genius, without any gross materials, such as poetry and history: But still it is the regularity that pleases, the proportion of the parts, and the harmony of the whole; and the more complicated and various the matter or the subject is, it is the more pleasing, provided the regularity be apparent. Why then should we not admire the beauties of nature? Nay, don't we all agree, that those are the most beautiful works of art, which copy the most exactly after nature, and are the truest imitation of her original forms?

Let us therefore fix our thoughts in a steady contemplation of the world about us; view it in this light, as a regular finished system, discovering exquisite skill in the exact proportion of all its parts, and a perfect symmetry in the whole. In vain shall we seek for beauty, harmony and order, in the productions of human genius: If we turn our eyes with attention to all things around us, in their simple natural appearance, the idea of a nobler regularity, and more grand design, will arise in our minds. Is there any image made by painting or sculpture, equal to the human face and person, any map or landskip to the natural soil itself diversified with real rocks and hills,

hills, tall trees in blossom or laden with fruit, and cattle ranging the wide pasture? How wonderful is the structure of a single animal, inimitable by art; its parts made according to exact measure, and so conveniently situated, that every one performs its proper functions, useful to the whole? this animal has a near relation to the kind, the kind itself to other species; all in such a due disposition, that every individual is provided for, living commodiously on this terrestrial globe, which continually receives its vital warmth whereby they are nourished, from the far distant heavenly bodies, holding on their perpetual course. Here is a noble subject of meditation, to a mind that delights in harmony and order; but whither will it lead us? Directly to the acknowledgment of perfect understanding in the universe, of all-ruling wisdom, in conjunction with the most amiable goodness, the true compleat original beauty, the fountain of all excellence and perfection. *Praise the Lord all ye his works; praise him ye angels and all his hosts; praise him sun and moon; praise him ye stars of light; praise him ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that are above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created, he hath also established them for ever, he hath made a decree which shall not pass. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling his word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl. Kings of the earth and all people, princes and judges. Both young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heaven*.* O Lord, how manifold are thy works? In wisdom thou hast made them all, the earth is full of thy riches; so is the great and wide sea, wherein are things

* Psal. cxlviii.

from the Frame of the Material World. 23

creeping innumerable, both great and small beasts. These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather; thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good*. Therefore let every one of us resolve with the devout Psalmist †, *I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have being.*

* Psal. civ. v. 24, 25, 27, 28. † v. 33.

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D I S

DISCOURSE II.

The Being of God proved from Human Intelligence and Morality.

[ABERNETHY.]

ROM. i. 19, 20.

Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

I HAVE endeavoured in a preceding discourse to prove the Being of God from his works, that is, as the question is properly stated between the *Atheists* and us, to prove an active intelligence in the formation of the universe. Indeed the existence of the very lowest things we see, the most contemptible pebble or clod of earth, cannot be accounted for without the agency of an intelligent and powerful Cause; much less this beautiful system of the world, disposed in such exquisite order, and having its parts so exactly fitted to each other, as to make up one regular whole. But above all, that understanding which we are conscious of in ourselves, even constrains us to acknowledge the supreme eternal Mind as its

Author. For if inanimate matter formed into a system, discovers his glorious wisdom and activity, much more his own living image in our perceptive and self-determining powers. This last well deserves a particular consideration, as containing a peculiarly illustrious manifestation of the divine wisdom; and I hope, by a due attention to what passes in our own minds, we shall find ourselves obliged to recognize the All-ruling intelligence of our Maker, and to adore him who *is perfect in knowledge*.

Here I shall confine myself to what is called pure intellection, that is, those exercises of the mind which abstract wholly from the external senses, and the sole object of them, singular corporeal existence. For though, as I observed before, the sensitive and intellectual powers are employed about the same object, apprehending it in a very different manner, yet are there intelligibles, indeed those of the sublimest kind, in which we have the greatest certainty of knowledge, as well as the noblest mental entertainment, which do not at all fall under the perception of the senses; such as the abstract ideas of natures or essences, eternal truths and moral qualities, which have all of them, though no sensible existence, yet an important reality, and the ideas of them in the eternal mind are their original archetypes.

First, Abstract Natures or Essences are represented by some as the mere creatures of the human understanding, taking occasion from the apparent similitude and dissimilitude of things to form abstract notions of their several different kinds, which nowhere subsist but in the understanding itself; at the same time referring to the internal constitutions of things, the true cause of the apparent similitude and dissimilitude of their outward forms. These internal constitutions are the real Essences, for the most part unknown to us; and the essences which are the objects of our apprehension, are therefore called nominal, because the true interior nature of things, whereby they are what they

they are, complete in themselves and invariably distinct from all others, lie too deep for us to discover. Now though this may be a fair representation of the method in which the human understanding proceeds, and the true origin of its ideas of Essences, (which being posterior to individual existence, and derived from it, can be no more perfect than our knowledge of individual existing things) yet it leads us by clear reasoning to conclude, that there is a more perfect knowledge of Essences, which abstracting from actual existence, can only subsist as ideas in a mind, but it must be a mind infinitely more perfect than ours.

To shew this, I shall take leave to borrow an observation from a celebrated author, who gives the very account of Essences which I have been mentioning *. He tells us, that we know the Essences, and distinguish the species of artificial things, with far less confusion and uncertainty than natural things, because an artificial thing being a production of man, which the artificer designed, and well knows the idea of, the name of it is supposed to stand for no other idea, nor to import any other Essence than what is certainly to be known, and easy enough to be apprehended. He might have said, that every sensible Artificer must perfectly know the real essence of his own work, so far as it is his own, however ignorant he may be of the nature of the materials, stones, timber, iron, silver, gold, or whatever they are, which another intirely unacquainted with the mechanic art, may understand much better; yet the proper disposition of the parts, and joining them fitly together, so as to make one compleat fabric or machine, which is his own work, he must know; and his understanding reaches to a thorough comprehension of the design, which is its true essence, before he begins the manual operation. Now applying this to the great Artificer of nature, *who stretched out the heavens*

* *Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, Book III. Ch. vi.*

by his wisdom, and established the earth by his discretion, we must conclude, that since he was the intending Cause of the world, and exercised active intelligence in the formation of all things, the plan was formed in his All-comprehending mind. In other words, the design or the archetypal ideas of the true Essences of things, subsisted in his understanding before the things themselves actually had a being : for who can imagine such an inconsistency as intelligence in the operation and not in the intention ? Can a work be made with wisdom, and wisdom not be prior to it, or the parts of a structure so put together as to show wise contrivance, without the Agent's having laid a scheme before hand, and formed a model by which his proceeding should be directed ?

But further we must conceive in a designing cause, freedom and choice, especially in a complicated production, which comprehends a great variety of parts. One general end is to be obtained, taking in many which are subordinate ; a vast variety of means are presented to the mind, the fittest of which are to be chosen, and the rest rejected. This to imperfect understandings is the cause of long deliberation upon their projects ; they take time to compare the means which offer themselves to their thoughts ; and try which, upon the whole, as far as they can judge, are the most convenient ; but without a plurality of such means or parts, we can have no notion of wisdom exercised in the work, for it consists in a choice or preference of the best and fittest. Now when we survey the world, so much of it as is known to us, (how extensive actual existence is beyond our sight or the reach of our understandings we cannot possibly tell,) containing such a multitude of beings as cannot be numbered, all formed and disposed with intelligence and design, shewing that the ideas of them subsisted beforeⁱⁿ the mind of the author ; what a vast variety of ideas, (we lose ourselves in imagining it,) must we suppose to have been in the same understanding,

standing, that there might be room for that preference, which we cannot help thinking, is absolutely necessary to the exercise of wisdom in his works? No one can say the world could not possibly have been otherwise than it is, or any of its parts otherwise than they are, in this sense that it would imply a contradiction in the nature of things. For that is in effect to deny all free agency, and all wisdom in the formation of the world; which is, I think, already proved by convincing arguments. But if that the world could not be otherwise than it is, supposes intelligence, and therefore means that of all possible systems appearing to his own mind, the Creator chose that which in the whole, was the fittest and the best;—This necessarily implies what I just now said, namely, that other models or designs were equally in his power, and all alike actually in the view of his understanding, prior, I do not say in time, but in our order of conceiving, to the determination of producing the system which now actually exists. This seems to be the true meaning of *Plato's* ideas, which he represents as the original forms and exemplars of whatever is in being; that is, the conceptions of the divine most perfect intellect, in which the whole scheme of existence was laid; though some of the latter *Platonists* turned his doctrine to an absurdity, (and perhaps he gave too great occasion to it himself,) calling those ideas not only archetypes and patterns, but living substances and physical causes, nay, a sort of deities. Here then we find in the universe, not only intelligence, directing the frame of nature, finishing all the particular forms in it, and appointing them their proper places, disposing the whole circle of being, and guiding the intire series of causes, with their operations; but an understanding not limited by the universe itself, reaching to the utmost bounds of possibility, and comprehending all conceivable essences or intelligible forms, relations, connexions and dependencies of things.

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2dly, As these abstract ideas appearing to our minds, are the materials of all our science which is not conversant about singular existence, and in proportion as they are discerned by every mind, they are the materials of its knowledge; so upon comparing them results Truth, (for it consists in their agreement,) which is another real and important object of the understanding. Our minds are made with a desire to discover truth, and they rest in it when found, with great satisfaction; though our knowledge of essences is very imperfect, and what we call the essences of natural things actually existent, that is, our own abstract ideas of them, are for the most part little more than nominal; yet the perception of their agreement is to us certain truth, and we acquiesce in it with pleasure: But that mind which thoroughly comprehends the real natures of things, having formed them with all their properties and powers, must see an infinity of truths in their various relations, which we cannot discern. Let it be especially observed, that our principal and most satisfying knowledge is purely intellectual, the subject of it being our own ideas, which abstract intirely from existence. For example, the points, lines and figures which are the subject of mathematical demonstration, are not perceived by our senses, nor supposed to have a sensible existence, but only are our own ideas abstracting from all matter, really formed, or imagined to be formed into such figures; those straight lines, curves, triangles, squares and other figures, whose properties, mutual relations, equalities and proportions are demonstrated, perhaps could none of them exactly, certainly some of them could not be exemplified in bulky materials, nor do the demonstrations concerning them depend on that, the subject of them being only our own ideas; yet no man who understands them will say they are chimerical, since he sees real truth in them, to which he cannot refuse his assent: Nor can it be reasonably said that they depend wholly

on the mind, and are its arbitrary combinations of its own ideas ; for it cannot make truth or falshood, but must consider them as independent on its own pleasure, and equally real whether it discerns them or not. It remains then that geometrical theorems and other propositions, (for I mention them only as examples,) are eternal verities, the same at all times, and, as some of the ancients speak, ingenerable and incorruptible, alike true whether any human mind perceives them or not, nay, whether any human minds exists or not. But were these eternal necessary truths altogether unknown before any human mind existed? No, they were the proper objects of eternal necessary intelligence, subsisting in the eternal mind. The occasion of our discerning them is taken from the works of God ; it is from corporeal beings we get the ideas of figures and numbers ; (though the abstract ideas we form of them, are not sensible but intellectual,) and the same may be said concerning the subjects of other self-evident, or demonstrated propositions. Now has God scattered over his works such traces of intelligence, that very imperfect observers are led by them to see, and be delighted with truth, and shall himself not discern that same truth? Nay, must he not have discerned it from everlasting, since from everlasting it was equally discernable by a perfect understanding, which comprehended the essences, that is, the ideas of things with all their relations, whence that truth necessarily results? Surely we have no mental perfection but what is derived from the eternal Mind, the Father of our spirits. If then we are endued with a power of discovering truth, (which we cannot reflect upon without having pleasure in it, as an excellence in our nature,) he must have possessed that power in a more eminent and perfect manner before we had a being, and the truths which were eternally knowable, must be to him eternally known. Human science lies within a narrow compass, but certainly it is one of the most delightful

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ful entertainments the mind can have. What pleasure does it give, to some at least, to see a proposition demonstrated, which comprehends, and to full conviction determines the relation of a great variety of things, for example, the proportion of many different lines or figures? And can we imagine that our nature, in every part of its constitution carrying the plainest marks of understanding and design, could be made with a sense of beauty in such truths, and yet the designing Author of that nature, be ignorant of them? Thus we behold the divine wisdom manifested in the intelligible as well as the sensible world, and by some sketches of eternal truth, which we ourselves are enabled to discern with delight, we have not only clear evidence that the first of Beings, the original Cause of all things, is himself intelligent, but are led to a more enlarged view of what is the agreeable, though to us incomprehensible object of his eternal contemplation.

3dly, This will still more fully appear, if we consider moral qualities and truths, which evidently appear to our minds, and are of the greatest importance to the ends of our being. Without entering into the detail of these qualities and truths, which may be supposed to be so far known as is necessary to our present purpose, I shall only make the following observations concerning them. First, That they are intirely abstracted from the external senses and their objects. Other animals which have those senses in common with us, give no discovery of their having any notions of morality; and are not reckoned moral agents, which is the highest and peculiar character of rational beings. How could the external senses lead us to any sentiments of virtue, which has not the least relation to any qualities of matter, either primary or secondary? What resemblance have justice and benevolence to the figure and motion of bodies, or what affinity with colours, sounds or tastes? Nor indeed do the ends of sensitive life require

quire so sublime a sense as that of morality; the preservation of individuals and of the kind, and their usefulness to other species of beings in their manner, which are its highest apparent purposes; these ends, I say, are all answered by lower instincts.

2dly, Moral qualities, which have no other subject than the affections of the soul, and actions proceeding from them, though intirely independent on matter and all its properties, are yet real, and necessarily regarded by our mind as such. A sense of moral beauty and deformity in human characters and actions, is as natural as a sense of another kind of beauty and deformity in corporeal forms; nay, our minds as necessarily perceive a difference between cruelty and mercy, gratitude and ingratitude, temperance and debauchery, as between light and darkness, sweet and bitter, harmony and discord, which we distinguish by our external senses. The idea of virtue, whether in ourselves or others, is always accompanied with approbation, and vice with dislike. An excellent moral character constantly attracts our esteem, and a vicious one cannot be consider'd otherwise than with aversion; a beneficent action is applauded, and a cruel one condemned, abstracting from any advantage or disadvantage to ourselves arising from either. We review virtuous dispositions in our own hearts, and virtuous works flowing from them, with the highest satisfaction, and the contrary are unavoidably attended with remorse. It is true, that there is a great variety in the practice of virtue, which in some instances is attended with embarrassing circumstances, and in our present state there are many things to divert our attention from it. On these accounts, and because of negligence, corrupt customs, the prejudices of education, and particularly false notions of religion, some may have far less knowledge of virtue than others, and the virtuous affections may be weaker in them; but a sense of morality, (capable indeed of more or less improvement, accord-

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according to our opportunities and the degrees of our attention and diligence,) seems to be indelibly imprinted on our nature, so that we can no more divest ourselves of it altogether, than we can put off humanity itself.

3dly, As moral qualities, and truths concerning them, are real, and necessarily regarded by our minds, so they are of the greatest importance to the happiness of mankind. This I have hinted already with respect to particular persons; having observ'd that the peace and satisfaction of their minds depends, in a great measure, upon an inward consciousness of virtuous dispositions, and the designed regulation of their conduct by them. I believe every man will find by experience, that he is not able wholly to extinguish his sentiments of morality, nor without the utmost violence to obscure and weaken them so, but that his heart will condemn him for his crimes; nor can he arrive to an unmanly ease in his vices, 'till after a long course of affected stupidity and sottish infatuation; which is reproachful to the rational nature, and takes away the truest self-enjoyment. How unhappy are wicked men by their wickedness? What a train of miseries and misfortunes in the present state, arise from debauchery and sensual excesses; from fraud and violence? But if there be intelligence in framing the human nature, and appointing the condition of men, it must extend to the whole kind. And indeed morality may be therefore pronounced important to our natures, because it does not only in a sensible manner affect the interest of single persons, but the greatest collective bodies of them, nay, the intire species. Let any one imagine the whole human race to be without the least sense of virtue, of the fear of God, of good-will to mankind, of the excellence of honesty, gratitude, fidelity, temperance, and the turpitude of the contrary, so that there should be nothing left but the fear of personal outward danger and inconveniences to prevent the most licentious rage

of unruly destructive passions, and all the mischiefs they could produce; how miserable, upon such a supposition, would our state be? It may be reasonably question'd whether the kind could have subsisted so long, or any remain'd to have inhabited the earth; but at least it is certain, life must have been a dull, uncomfortable, inelegant and insipid thing, in comparison of what it now actually is, unadorned with those arts and inventions which are owing to the secure possession of peace and liberty, unimprov'd by science, and destitute of the high pleasures of friendship, and all kinds of delightful social entertainment: (not to speak of a future state, the happiness of which (if there really be such a thing) must necessarily depend upon virtue;) nor is it possible for the mind of man, calmly and deliberately to judge otherwise; and of that future state we have constant premonitions in our own presaging thoughts, (so strong as most sensibly to affect the comfort of our present being,) without, at least, any possible security against it.

Now if these observations be true and just, (and whether they are or not, let every man, upon calm reflexion, judge for himself) let us see what consequences may be fairly drawn from them to our present purpose. In the first place, here is an important part of the human constitution which can never be accounted for upon *Atheistic* grounds, that is chance or mechanism, the fortuitous rencounter of atoms, or the necessary result of matter and motion. Supposing an accidental concourse of atoms moving in an infinite void, or an undirected force impress'd on matter, could possibly produce corporeal systems and their various beautiful forms which we see, yet how shall this hypothesis solve the phenomena of moral Entities? What strange collision of atoms, or undirected impulse of matter, could produce beauty and deformity in human characters and actions? Could any combination of figures, or disposition and

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agitation of material parts, strike out the ideas of just and unjust, kind and unkind, sober and vicious? Shall it be said that these are mere fancies, the arbitrary figments of the mind, without any true and solid foundations in nature? I answer, that indeed our ideas of morality are not ideas of corporeal existence, but it does not follow that therefore they are not real. Let any man try how he can satisfy himself concerning the reality of any object of his knowledge. If his organs are duly dispos'd, if he is conscious to himself that he has the free and undisturb'd exercise of his rational powers, if his perceptions be clear and distinct, and especially if they be constant and uniform, his ideas always the same, independently of his own choice, whenever he applies his mind to the review of them;—when it is so, there can be no doubt concerning the reality of such knowledge, unless we introduce an universal scepticism. Can any man in his senses make it a question whether his ideas of colours, and tastes and sounds, be real or phantastical? As little reason has he to doubt the reality of his ideas of *pure, and true, and just, and honest, and virtuous.* In the best state of his mind, when his understanding is clearest and freest from disturbance, whenever he thinks of moral differences, they appear always the same; nay, the more he considers them, the more plain and important they appear. Can we doubt whether a thing exists which causes in us pleasure or pain, whether we will or not? for example, whether the fire exists which warms or burns us? whether a sharp iron instrument exists, which piercing our flesh causes the sensation of acute pain? In like manner, has any man reason to doubt whether there be a real difference between virtuous dispositions and works, which diffuse inward serenity and satisfaction through his mind, and vicious ones which necessarily fill him with horror and the most painful self-condemnation? We must therefore, to account for this appearance, abandon the *Atheistic* scheme and all the forms of it,

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and have our recourse to an intelligent Cause, which has deeply interwoven into the human constitution a sense of things intirely independent on matter and all its properties and powers, as real however as any we perceive by our external senses; concerning which we can form propositions as true and certain, and draw consequences from them as clear as any which appear to our minds. For even the properties of lines and geometrical figures, and the incommensurability of some with others, is not more evident than the moral fitness and unfitness of some actions.*

2dly, The importance of morality to the human life, and to its main ends, shews wisdom and design in giving men the sense and knowledge of it. Political constitutions are reasonably judg'd to be form'd with understanding, because of the ends which they answer. When laws are well framed for the preservation of public peace and order; the measures of civil authority and subjection wisely settled; provision made for supporting the legal powers of the rulers, and liberties of the people; for securing them against foreign invasions and intestine broils, for deciding their debates about property in an equitable manner, for encouraging industry and other virtues, which tend to the benefit of the society, and restraining those irregularities which threaten its destruction;---when all this is apparent in the constitution of any community, no one will attribute it to a casual unconcerted encounter of men, since there are so plain evidences of wisdom and design in the whole scheme. As little reason is there to imagine, that when a species of intelligent beings are sent into the world with sentiments of morality, which are so evidently conducive to their happiness, tending to improve their nature, to ennoble the life of every one of them, filling it with a variety of rational pleasure, and to render them eminently useful to one another, so that it is hardly to be conceiv'd to what a height of perfection and felicity they would be rais'd, if these moral sentiments were duly

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duly improv'd and had their full effect, and on the other hand how miserable the whole race would be, if intirely destitute of them; it is unreasonable, I say, to imagine that this should be without a directing Intelligence in the Cause of it.

Nothing can be more groundless and unsupported with any pretence of reason, than to alledge that the notions of morality, so common and prevailing in the world, were originally invented by politicians, and by their artifice imposed upon credulous mankind, as the dictates of nature. For, (besides that strict virtue is often too little agreeable to the maxims and measures of their policy, to give it any appearance of proceeding from such an original;) every man who will look carefully into his own heart, may find there a standard of right and wrong, prior to any instructions, declarations and laws of men, whereby he pronounces judgment upon them. Nor was it ever known that any human invention, or any thing which was not the voice of reason and nature itself, appeared so uniform and unvaried, always consistent with itself, and always in the same light to the minds of men, as the principal moral species do. The forms of civil government differ according to the circumstances and inclinations of the people who create them: the external forms of religion too are variable; and so is every thing of positive appointment and institution. But justice and mercy, gratitude and truth never alter; the learned and the unlearned, the most uninstructed and the most polite nations agree in their notions concerning them; and whenever they are intelligibly proposed, approve them.

It is therefore evident, that morality is a part of the human constitution, and must be attributed to its author. Let this be understood in a sense agreeable to the nature of the thing. I do not mean that we are necessarily virtuous, as we are sensitive and intelligent; or that the practice of virtue is so essential, that no man can possibly be without it; (for the very

notion of it imports free agency or choice;) but I mean, that the mind of man is so framed, as, when it attains the full exercise of its rational powers, to be necessarily sensible of moral obligations; and so far determined to satisfy them, that it cannot wilfully and designedly act a contrary part, without doing violence to itself; which is all the necessity that is consistent with the nature of such a being, and the nature of morality. If it be so, we may surely infer, that the cause of this constitution was intelligent. Since all the individuals of mankind are found to have a sense of virtue, and every one of them who reflects upon it must be conscious that it is engraven on his heart, prior to any intention of his own, or any instruction that he knows of, it must either have happened without any design at all, or it must have been design'd by the Author of our being. To say that moral agency, which is so universally the character of men, that without it no one can be reckon'd perfectly of the kind; and which is of so great importance, not only to the ornament and conveniency of life, but to all the highest purposes of our being, so far, that the want of it would make an essential difference in the species; to say that this is merely accidental, in other words, that there is no cause to be assign'd for it at all, is too gross an absurdity to require any confutation. If our minds can rest satisfied with that solution, there is an end of all rational enquiry; it may be said every thing came from nothing, and there is no cause to be sought of any perfection whatever. But if this be what we cannot possibly acquiesce in, (and indeed I will venture to say no man can, however he may force himself to a stupid inattention,) there is nothing left to conclude, but that we were made moral agents by an intending intelligent cause. I do not at present carry the argument so far as to infer from it the moral perfections of the Deity, tho' it will very well bear even *that*; but he that will shut his eyes against the evidence of understanding

standing and design in the formation of the human nature, as we see it is form'd universally, with a sense of virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong in actions, and with a necessary approbation of the one and disapprobation of the other; I say, he that can shut his eyes against this evidence, is hardened beyond the power of reasonable conviction, and is no more fit to be argued with.

This I have endeavour'd, by a distinct consideration of the various works of God, to prove his Being, that is, (which was the point to be prov'd, and is directly the point in controversy between us and *Atheists*;) that the formation of the universe and all its parts, is to be attributed to an active intelligent and designing Cause. But if this be so clear as we alledge, how comes it to pass that any of mankind should deny it; nay, that men, in whose writings there is a considerable appearance of reasoning and learning, profess'dly maintain the contrary principle? That men should be ignorant of God may be accounted for from their inattention; nor is it any presumption at all against the truth of his Being and Attributes; since we know in a multitude of instances, that the generality of mankind are ignorant of the most certain truths, tho' *this* is a matter of such common concernment and so universally acknowledged in the world, that scarcely any one is without a loud call to attend to it. But if the evidence be so strong as is pretended, it is surprizing that men, otherwise sensible, and whose knowledge qualifies them to write in a tolerably consistent manner, should avow a disbelief of this grand article.

To remove this prejudice which may arise in some minds from the profession of *Atheism* by learned men, let it be observed, *First*, That other great absurdities, contrary to the clearest evidence, even that of sense, have in like manner been advanc'd by philosophers themselves, whether from an affectation of superior knowledge, enabling them to puzzle the plainest

truths and confound vulgar understandings, or from whatever other cause it proceeded, the fact is certain, that the most extravagant opinions have been vented with a show of strong arguments to support them, and demonstrations have been boasted of to prove what all mankind by their eye-sight knew to be false. It is very well known that *Zeno* and other philosophers have pretended to prove by demonstrative reasons that there is not, nor can be any such thing as motion. *Secondly*, The nature of this subject is such, that our weak minds must necessarily be embarrassed in their conceptions of it: the necessary existence and absolute perfections of the supreme Being, which our reason obliges us to ascribe to him, are so far beyond our comprehension, that we cannot possibly form an adequate idea of them. How can we, seeing all things about us in the world circumscrib'd within certain bounds, conscious of limited existence, a limited power and understanding, and a short duration, comprehend infinity and eternity which must belong to the first Cause of all things? This incomprehensibility, and these difficulties in conceiving what is so high above us, have been magnified by men, thro' the pride of their hearts, into strong objections against the truth, otherwise fully evident; and a fond conceit of their own abilities, which made them scorn to acknowledge any thing too hard for them, was the fatal snare which betray'd them into the most horrid impiety. Thus, by what they called *wisdom*, or by a false show of knowledge, *they know not God*, tho' he manifested himself clearly to them by his works. *Thirdly*, The opinions concerning the Deity, which sometimes prevail'd among those who profess'd to believe it, were so absurd, that some were tempted by them to doubt of, or deny it altogether. When the *glory of God was changed into the image of corruptible men, and of birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things*; and the Godhead was parcell'd out among a multitude of things, or rather inconsistent notions which

which had no manner of likeness to the true God; when the doctrine of *Theism* was thus misrepresented, it is not very much to be wondered at, that some should be led to reject it in the lump, who had not understanding, candour and patience enough to examine things narrowly, that they might distinguish between truth and falsehood. The transition from *Polytheism* to *Atheism*, and from a foolish, immoral and barbarous religion to none at all, was only a transition from one absurdity to another.

But in the last place, above all, the viciousness of men's tempers and the wickedness of their lives, which they were unwilling to part with, was the prevailing snare whereby they were led into this greatest of all errors. They must have been very unattentive to what may be commonly observ'd in the world, and indeed to the constitution of the human mind, who do not know that it is often bias'd by its affections, and misled in its judgment of things by interest and passion. Men are difficultly persuaded to embrace disagreeable opinions, and too easily induc'd to believe what they wish to be true. The slenderest appearances of reason on the side of inclination, pass for strong arguments, and insuperable difficulties against it are neglected as trifling objections. Now, as the idea of God always takes in authority over men, his inspection into their affairs and their accountableness to him, and is therefore accompanied with a suspicion at least, that the crimes with which their consciences charge them, will meet with his disapprobation, and a punishment from him, of which they know no measure nor end; 'tis this which fills them with a dread of his Being; and because they are obstinately unwilling to reconcile themselves to the thoughts of it, and make it sit easy on their minds by a resolution of forsaking their vicious courses, they are led at last to an utter denial of it, that so they may get rid of those uneasy apprehensions which arise in them from the consideration of his moral character.

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But the generality of bad men treat the principles of religion with neglect; they don't carry their opposition to them so far as to form any thing like a consistent scheme of *Atheism*, in which their minds may rest satisfied as truth, but rather endeavour to bury them in forgetfulness, applying their thoughts to other affairs and amusements in which they take greater pleasure. They greedily entertain a bold jest or a sally of wit which tends to countenance their vices. But the main support of them is stupid inconsideration, which has all the effects of infidelity, with regard to any influence on their practice; for principles not at all attended to, can no more excite the affections and regulate our conduct, than if they were not believed. Nor is inconsideration less criminal; for the guilt of wrong opinions arising wholly from negligence, prejudices and bad dispositions, wherever these are equally prevalent, they are equally faulty, whether they produce errors in judgment or not.

It may be alledg'd on the other hand, that virtuous minds are prejudiced in favour of *Theism*. As morality appears to them most amiable, they are apt to imagine, perhaps without sufficient evidence, such a constitution of things in the universe as is favourable to it: to intitle it to a perfect understanding of which they think it is worthy, and put it under the protection of irresistible power. I acknowledge this is so far true, that I believe it is hardly possible for a sincere lover of virtue, not to have his affections engag'd to the Deity; not to wish his Being earnestly, if it should appear at all doubtful, or that any suspicion lies against it; and not to rejoice in it when he is fully persuaded that it is true. Let an *Atheist* call this prejudice if he will, I should never be asham'd of it. A principle which has a necessary connexion with virtue, is its chief support, and without which it cannot prevail in the world; such a principle is not dangerous if it can possibly be a mistake, tho' its excellent tendency, I may say absolute necessity to the happiness

of mankind, is a strong presumption of its truth. But if this be the prepossession of virtuous minds, the contrary temper disposes to a contrary opinion. Let these two be set against each other, that we may judge which is the most becoming human nature, and has the greatest probability of leading us to a right judgment. I believe at last the cause of religion and virtue must stand or fall together, and the hearty friends of the latter cannot be enemies to the other.

But still it may seem strange that this great fundamental article should be liable to any controversy; that since it is of so great importance to the duty and happiness of intelligent creatures to acknowledge the supreme Being, the evidence of his existence and his attributes is not so strong as to exclude all possibility of doubt. If this be meant as an objection against, or ground of suspicion concerning the truth of that grand article, the Being of God, it has no colour of argument to that purpose. For the only principle it can rest upon is this, that nothing is to be certainly believ'd, which can at all be contradicted: and if that be allow'd, our knowledge will lie within a very narrow compass. Except our own being, and some few axioms of very little use, without such applications of them, and consequences from them, as may be involv'd in dispute, almost nothing will pass for certain. The existence of matter, the possibility of motion, and even geometrical truths have been argued against and deny'd; nay, perhaps there is scarcely any proposition capable of proof, but what is capable of being contradicted, thro' the weakness, inattention, or prejudices of men. If the pretence that the evidence of the divine Being and Attributes is not so satisfying as might be expected, at least not so necessitating as to exclude all possibility of doubt; if, I say, the pretence be carried no farther than as an alledged instance of defectiveness in the human constitution, and therefore difficultly reconciled to the wisdom and goodness of its Author; the consideration of it in that view, does

not belong to this place, where we are only insisting on the evidence of the principle itself. And yet, not to pass it by altogether unregarded, I observe that the true meaning of the objection really amounts to no more than this, that it is hardly consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God to make rational creatures so imperfect as we are, or wanting a certain perfection which we imagine would have been very proper for them; particularly without an intuitive knowledge of His existence, such as they have of their own being. Now how is it possible for any man to prove that such a constitution was wrong; that in a world which contains so great a variety of creatures with so many different kinds and degrees of perfection, Wisdom and Goodness did not allow that there should be an order of intelligent beings, who should not indeed have the knowledge of their Maker, (upon which their duty and their greatest happiness depends,) forced upon them, so that they could not possibly resist it, yet with sufficient evidence of the truth, and faculties enabling them to discern it; at the same time under obligations, which must appear if they reflect on their own constitution, to use their faculties for that purpose?

How wisdom and goodness may require that Atheists should be dealt with, is quite another question. What unhappiness they may bring upon themselves by their own perverseness, leading them into their fatal error, or what allowances are to be made for particular infelicities in the condition of any, which may give some occasion to it, God knows best, and the Judge of the whole world will surely do right. But for us, our proper business is, without murmuring at any appointed imperfections in our make, to improve all the advantages of it in the best manner we can, that we may attain to the affectionate practical knowledge of our Creator, and thereby to all that perfection and happiness to which it tends to raise our nature. And to conclude with a particular application

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tion of the argument I have been insisting on. Since we have so full proof of ruling intelligence in the formation and government of the world, since all the works of nature proclaim it, and especially our own constitution, (for who but the author of our being *hath put wisdom in the inward parts, and given understanding to the heart* *?) this is the character of the Deity which claims our highest veneration. It is a very elegant description which *Job* † gives us of the excellence of wisdom, and which every attentive mind must assent to, *Man knoweth not the price thereof, it cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for it. It cannot be valued with gold of Ophir, with the precious onix, or the saphir. The gold and the chrystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of pearl, for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it. But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? The depth, and the sea, and destruction, and death, say it is not in them.* The effects of it are scatter'd over all the works of nature, and the whole œconomy of providence, in a beautiful variety; and the lively image of it is stamp'd on rational creatures, whom God has taught what is their true wisdom, namely *to fear him, and to depart from evil*, and to whom he has communicated such an understanding as we cannot but account the high distinguishing privilege of their nature. But how much more to be admired, and worthy of our most peculiar veneration and esteem, is the eternal fountain of intellectual light, who is himself only *perfect in knowledge*.

* Job xxxviii. 36.

† Chap. xxviii.

DISCOURSE III.

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature
explained and asserted.

[ABERNETHY.]

John iv. 24.

God is a Spirit.

I Have endeavoured in the foregoing discourses to prove that first fundamental principle of religion, the existence of the Deity, or of an active intelligent Being, who is the original Cause of all the great appearances in the corporeal system of the universe, and of those self-moving, sensitive, and intellectual powers, with which many particular beings are endued. But intending to establish this great truth on such a foundation as should comprehend all believers in God, however otherwise differing in their opinions, at the same time the most evident, and the least liable to difficulties, I abstracted from the consideration of those properties, perfections or attributes, which belong to the Divine nature, not insisting even on its spirituality. Nevertheless, it will set the whole subject still in a clearer light, and add great force to the arguments which have been already adduced, if we can advance one step farther, and prove that the supreme, active and intelligent Cause of all things, is spiritual, or immaterial. And this I shall endeavour to do in the following method; *First*, I will shew, from the
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frame and appearances of the material world itself, that there is such a thing as spirit, essentially different from matter. *Secondly*, That the beings which are endued with life, sense and understanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are spiritual; from whence it will evidently follow, that the original Cause is himself a pure Spirit.

First, To show from the frame and appearances of the material world itself, that there is such a thing as spirit, essentially different from matter. This alone is sufficient to overthrow the fundamental grounds of *Atheism*: For however different its forms be, they all agree in excluding spirit from any share in the origin and constitution of things, and in the effects we see produc'd; ascribing them all, even sense and self-motion which we perceive in animals, nay, and understanding which we are conscious of in ourselves,--ascribing all, I say, to senseless matter and its casual or necessary motion. The admission of spirit would ruin the *Atheistic* scheme: for spirit is suppos'd to be essentially distinct from body, being by its nature active and intelligent; and if that be once allow'd to have an existence separate from, and independent on matter, by what pretence of reason shall counsel and design be excluded out of the formation and government of the world, or any part of it? Nay, where can a barrier be fixed against infinite perfection, or the Deity? Now that spirit must be admitted, will appear from this consideration; that attending carefully to the obvious common properties of matter, we shall find it impossible, without having recourse to the agency of spirit, to account for the motion, the changes of the situation, and of the magnitude, figure and other qualities of corporeal beings. It is the necessary condition of all bodies, the very law of their nature, to continue in the state wherein they are, and to resist any alteration, until it be effected, and the resistance conquered, by an external force. If this necessarily belongs to all matter,

ter, its smallest and its greatest quantities, how shall the beginning of motion and the most common appearances in material nature itself, such as the changes of its form which depend upon motion, be explained without an external agent?

Those who have studied the powers of matter with the greatest exactness, find that there is established among all the bodies a law of mutual attraction and gravitation; and by the help of this one observation, attending to it closely and pursuing it through all its consequences, they have made the greatest improvements in natural philosophy, and given the most satisfying explication which has yet appear'd, of the constant motions and other great phænomena in the visible heavens and the earth. But they do not pretend to tell us the cause of attraction and gravitation, whereby all bodies tend towards each other, with a force greater or lesser according to their distances: Only 'tis certain, this active moving force is not in bodies themselves. For all which can be call'd their action on each other, or their impulse, is by the contact of their surfaces; whereas the force of gravity operates at a distance, and is always in proportion to the solid content of the gravitating and attracting bodies; and therefore the immediate Cause must be something which pervades the intire mass of them even to their very centers, and makes an impression upon every particle. In vain should we fly for a satisfying solution of this appearance, to a subtle fluid matter, which penetrating solid bodies and filling their interstices, impels them towards each other. For besides that this is but an arbitrary supposition, it ought to be considered that subtle matter is matter still, passive and undesigning, not acting but acted upon. The difficulty will remain, and the question, as chang'd by this hypothesis, be as hard to answer as the question concerning the cause of gravitation without it. What is it that determines and gives a force to the (essentially unactive) subtle matter of the sun,

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sun, and the subtle matter of the earth, whereby they impel those bodies towards each other with a force proportionable to the quantity of solid extended substance they contain, when other bodies which contain a lesser quantity of the like extended solid substance, but are as open to the impressions of the undistinguishing subtle matter, do not so gravitate? In short, if we should heap material causes upon material causes to infinity, we shall never be satisfied in that way: there must be a beginning of operation from an active principle, which we call spirit, essentially distinct from matter. The ideas of it and its properties, namely, activity and consciousness, are as different from extension, solidity, divisibility and figure, which belong to all bodies, as any ideas in our minds can possibly be. The more we consider, the more we shall be convinc'd that matter of itself, and without spirit, can produce nothing even in itself, none of its own appearances, neither motion, gravity nor form; it is capable of being variously compounded and divided; it is capable of various figures and situations; but it can neither compound nor divide itself, neither change its figure nor situation.

If it be so, we must conclude there is such a thing in the world as spirit, essentially different from, but intimately present with all bodies which we see, and continually operating upon them, for it is the efficient cause of their most common and constant appearances. Mechanism itself cannot be without spirit, for the mechanical powers of matter, commonly so called, depend upon it, since gravity is owing to its influence. It is true all this does not directly prove understanding in the cause of motion, gravity, and other common appearances in the material world; but it proves activity essentially different from matter, which forms it and produces the most important effects that appear in it. And this is sufficient to overturn the grounds of *Atbeism*, showing that matter is not the

sole being or substance in the universe, and the sole origin and cause of all things. Besides, as we find by experience in ourselves, and other agents as far as we know, activity is still accompanied with thought and perception. There can be no rational pretence for denying understanding to the great active forming principle of the corporeal system, without which, matter, if it could possibly have existed, must have remain'd an eternal chaos, devoid of motion, and consequently of various figure, or any kind of regular appearance. What limits can be set to the intellectual perfection of that mighty Agent, who is independent of the material world, on whom it necessarily depends, prior in nature: For he is the author of its form, and has moulded its parts into their different shapes, with all the diversity of their different qualities, and given it those laws by which it is still govern'd? Rather indeed what we call its laws, are his own continued, uniform and regular operations. And tho', as I observ'd before, some who believ'd a Deity, weakly imagin'd him to be corporeal, not conceiving any substance distinct from matter; this was only an inconsistency in their notions, which proceeded from not attending to the irreconcilable difference between the ideas of material qualities and intelligence. If they had fully considered their own acknowledg'd principle of an eternal, all-wise and powerful mind, comparing with it the essential and most obvious properties of all matter, this would have corrected their error. But the case is very different of those who therefore exclude spirit, because they exclude original contrivance and agency; who not only profess, but their scheme necessarily requires them to do so, as the chief security of their grand principle against the existence of God, that there is no being in the universe but matter, from the modifications whereof all appearances arise, even intelligence itself. Which scheme is effectually refuted, it be prov'd that the simplest and most common

qualities of matter upon which its appearances depend, must be attributed to the energy of an active immaterial principle.

Secondly, The beings which are endu'd with life, sense and understanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are spiritual; that is, the vital sensitive and intelligent principles in them are spiritual. Indeed it would seem impossible in the nature of things, that matter should by any modification, that is, any motion and change of the figure and order of its parts, be exalted even into animal sensation, much less into pure intellection abstracted from any sensible quality. The reasoning of some ancient writers is very strong to prove that the percipient of material objects and their sensible qualities cannot be itself material. For if it were, the perceptive faculty must either be lodg'd in one single indivisible point; or in every point of the extended substance; or else every part must receive only a several part of the image or impression, and the perception be the result of the whole compar'd and united together. The first of these suppositions is an evident absurdity, there being no such thing as an indivisible point or particle of matter; and if there were, how can it be conceiv'd that a single atom in every animal should be only sensitive, the rest wholly incapable of that privilege; that it should alike receive the impression of all magnitudes; and that it should be invariably permanent through the whole life, when the other particles of matter which enter into the constitution are in a perpetual flux. That the whole perceptive power or the entire sensation, is not in every part of the supposed material soul, is as manifest; for upon that supposition, an animal would be, not a single percipient, but a collection of them; and the perception itself must be various, compounded of many; contrary to what we know it is by our own consciousness of its perfect simplicity. And *Lastly*, to say that every part of the perceiving extended substance, receives a several part

of the image or impression of the external object, will no way account for perception; because perception being single, it must, on that supposition, be the result of the whole united; and in order to that union, the parts must be brought to an indivisible point, properly the percipient, which has been already shewn to be absurd. If this reasoning be thought not obvious enough, (I have however set it in the clearest light I could,) yet it will naturally appear to any attentive person, very unreasonable to think, if not altogether unconceivable, that a body put into any form, (being really no more than an aggregate of parts void of life and sense,) should by any possible disposition of its parts, be rais'd to a capacity of animal sensation, the idea of which has not the least affinity with divisibility, magnitude, figure or any quality of matter. If it be so, we must conclude that there are beings in the world essentially different from matter. But the argument for the immateriality of the human soul will appear still stronger, if we consider the exercise of its purely intellectual powers. We have the ideas of matter by our senses, representing to our minds its sensible qualities, from which we infer its particular kind of existence, as the occasion, or somewhat which has the power of exciting those ideas. But attending to the exercises of our own minds, and reflecting on them, we have ideas of an intirely different kind, which do not take in any of the properties of matter, such as solidity, divisibility and figure, nor its secondary qualities, as hardness, colour and the like, nor the idea of motion. Of this sort are perception, consciousness, the affections of the mind, its desires and volitions or self-determinations, and the more complex qualities of gratitude, justice, generosity, mercy and other virtues; the subject of these we call spirit. Now these two kinds of ideas are as different as any can possibly be, without any mutual relation or agreement at all; and if we may not from thence infer a real difference between

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between the subjects of the properties which are represented by such essentially distinct ideas, there can be no certainty of human knowledge.

If these two points be settled upon clear evidence, that the active principle which form'd and governs the corporeal world is a spirit, and that the animating principles of the sensitive and rational life are spirits, we must infer that God also is a Spirit. For either he himself is the immediate forming and directing Cause of the corporeal system and its appearances; or the active principle, which is the immediate Cause, is deriv'd from him; and all the intelligent agents in the universe, not absolutely perfect nor eternal and unoriginated, (of which there is a numberless variety,) being spirits, cannot be the accidental or necessary result of certain dispositions in the parts of matter, but must proceed from an original intelligent and powerful Spirit: For that no perfection can belong to the effect which does not, in the same, or a more eminent degree belong to the Cause. But even upon supposition that the argument were not conclusive with respect to sensitive and inferior rational beings, and that it were not impossible for a particular system of matter to be endu'd with all the faculties of the human soul, yet still it holds concerning the supreme original Cause of all things. For that supposed possibility, (which some learned men allow, at the same time firmly believing that the Deity is, and necessarily must be immaterial,) means no more than that we are so ignorant of the essences and properties of things, as not to be sure of an utter inconsistency, in supposing that Omnipotence may endue a part of matter with the capacity of thought: But that matter merely of itself, and without the agency of a superior power, has not that capacity, and consequently, that original intelligence cannot be corporeal, is sufficiently evident.

Let us now more particularly consider this perfection of the Deity, which in our Saviour's judg-

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ment is a most necessary point of belief; for he taught it to a very ignorant person, and lays it as the foundation of the perfect and acceptable worship thus describ'd, *worship in spirit and truth*. 'Tis principally with this view we should apply our minds to the consideration of the Divine Attributes. All men who believe the Being of God, agree in acknowledging he is to be worshipped. Nature teaches us benevolence to an intelligent Being, reverence and submission to a superior, and gratitude to a benefactor, But if there is a God, he is the most perfect Intelligence, the supreme Lord, as being the independent Cause of things, and to him we owe our existence, all our powers and all our happiness. Therefore to him our best affections are unquestionably due, with the most proper and reasonable expressions of them. Besides, his unlimited dominion over us makes it our highest interest to please him as far as possibly we can, and obtain his approbation. These considerations show that nothing can concern us more than to understand the true character of the Supreme Being. Their ignorance of him involv'd multitudes of mankind in superstition, which was reproachful to their rational nature, and in consequence of that, in most scandalous and destructive vices. *Becoming vain in their imaginations concerning the divine perfections, their foolish hearts were darkened, and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into images made like corruptible things*; in pursuance of which they were abandon'd to *vile affections, to a reprobate mind* *, and to unnatural wickedness. It is true, that errors concerning the moral attributes of God, have the most immediate ill influence on the tempers and manners of men, because he being first suppos'd to be an object of the highest esteem and veneration, we shall naturally incline to imitate the dispositions and qualities which we ascribe to him, and account it our

* Rom. i. 21, 23, 24.

glory

glory to do so. For which reason, when the heathens imagin'd their gods were corrupt, passionate, revengeful and lascivious, it was to be expected that the worshippers should also, after their example, be corrupt, indulging themselves without restraint, in the same passions and the same sensual gratifications. But the natural perfections of the Deity are of a different consideration; for they are not the patterns which we pretend, or are supposed to imitate. It never enter'd into any man's mind that he must be eternal, immense and unchangeable like God, or such a spirit as he is. Yet the natural perfections tend to raise in our minds a high admiration of God; and besides, are consider'd as the foundation of the moral attributes, in the eminent degree wherein he is possess'd of them. So that erroneous opinions concerning the *one*, lead to pernicious mistakes about the *other*, and therefore it is necessary for us to inquire, as far as our faculties will enable us, into those divine perfections which are commonly called natural, by way of distinction from the moral, and to settle our notions concerning them. We cannot indeed by searching find out God, nor understand the Almighty to perfection: His essence is not to be comprehended by the human understanding, nor any of his attributes. When we call him a spirit, 'tis but a very obscure and inadequate idea we express by that word. The truth is, tho' we know there is a real difference between body and spirit, and this distinction is generally thought, (I will not affirm it to be exactly true,) to comprehend all kinds of beings in the universe, the subjects of the properties, qualities and modes of which we have any notion, or as they are commonly called, substances, yet, we do not understand the intimate essence of either. But the denomination of spirit is justly attributed to God, and gives us a true, tho' imperfect idea of his nature, as comprehending consciousness, intelligence, liberty and affections, the foundation and capacity of moral perfection and happiness,

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piness, which are the chief excellencies of inferior spirits above all material beings, and must eminently belong to the Father of Spirits.

That we may proceed further, and avoid mistakes in forming our notions of this subject, let it be observed, that as in the corporeal system we see a vast variety of forms, and in respect of various and important use, regularity, magnificence, and other qualities which strike the imagination, there are some bodies which appear much more excellent than others; so we cannot doubt but there may be, indeed that there are, many different kinds of beings comprehended under the general denomination of spirit. One low kind which we know best, are our own souls; which in the exercise of their faculties, have at present a great dependence on our bodies and their organs. But there is no reason at all to imagine, that the same is the condition of all spirits, and in every state. For as we perceive an essential difference between body and spirit, between the ideas of which and their properties there is no connexion, the mutual dependence of them which we find in ourselves, cannot be reasonably thought to arise from the nature of spirit; but the union of soul and body so as to make one man (the nature of which union we do not understand, only discern that the compounding parts have a mutual dependence and influence on each other) this, I say, is rather to be attributed to the free constitution and appointment of our Creator. There is no reason then why we should not conclude that our souls may, and that they shall subsist in a separate state, and exert their powers more perfectly than they do now. And there is no reason why we should not believe that there may be, and that there are other kinds of spirits, which have not, nor ever had a dependence, in their being, perfections and operations, on matter or any bodily organs. These appear to be the most excellent kind of spirits, which are the most independent on bodies, as being more unconfined in their manner

manner of perceiving external objects, and their activity not limited to a narrow sphere; besides being free from many other inconveniences, which our own experience teaches us that such a condition as ours is liable to. But the supreme Spirit is alone absolutely perfect and independent, having the intire system of matter under his direction, to form and dispose of it at his pleasure, not subject to such impressions from it, nor tied down to such a manner of acting upon it, as inferior spirits are, by the limited condition of their nature, and by the constitution which he has appointed for them.

The notion of some ancient philosophers, particularly the Stoics, that God is the soul of the world, was mean and unworthy of his high perfections. Tho' it imply'd an acknowledgment of the Divine Presence in all parts of the universe, every where intelligent and governing the whole, and represented all, even the most different and the most distant parts of the world, as united together in one system, under the care and direction of one sympathizing intelligent nature, which continually promotes the greatest absolute good of the whole, (which was a noble sentiment much insisted on by some of those learned men, and improved by them to excellent practical purposes;) yet that the Deity animates the *Mundane* system in the same manner that the human soul animates the human body, is too low a way of thinking concerning the supreme Being. For besides that it naturally leads one to imagine an independence of the world in its being, on the eternal Spirit, (as the human mind does not make its own body, nor has a power over its existence,) which probably was the erroneous opinion of some of the ancients, and tends to limit the Divine absolute Perfections and Presence to created nature; it carries in it such an idea of his subjection to impressions, and even uneasinesses arising from the disorders of the world; as is inconsistent with the infinite immutable excellence and happiness of his independent

pendent Being. The notion of an eminent modern philosopher is much more just and reasonable, who, as the result of his most curious and excellent observations on the Divine counsel and power manifested in the system of the universe, says, that the Deity imports the dominion of a spiritual Being over the world, not as his own body but as his servants, intirely subject to his government *.

This leads us to consider the peculiar and transcendent excellence of God as a Spirit. Tho' some inferior beings have the same denomination, and are truly of a spiritual nature, yet he is of an intirely different, and infinitely more perfect kind. There may be, for aught we know, as great a diversity in the spiritual, as in the material world; as many different species of spirits, that is, of beings which have no bodily substance, as there are of visible forms; and some of them as much inferior to, as well as distinct from others, as the lower kinds of life, perception and activity, are from dead and senseless matter itself. We must not therefore imagine, that we have form'd an adequate idea of God's nature, when we have proved him to be a spirit, and conceive of him as such; meaning by that name a living, intellectual and active being, essentially distinguished from corporeal substance. For tho' that is truly affirm'd of him in common with other spirits, yet he excels all other, even intellectual natures, more than our souls do the lowest inanimate beings.

There are two principal properties of spirit, intelligence and activity, which as I have shewn, must be attributed to the Deity; but they belong to him in an infinitely higher degree, and are exercised by him in a more perfect manner than by any dependent being. Tho' the common use of all languages ascribes to God the perceptions we are conscious of in ourselves, as seeing and hearing and remembrance; nay, and the organs of sensation, such as eyes and ears; yet scarce-

* Sir Isaac Newton, Schol. Gener.

ly are there any so ignorant as to understand these forms of speaking in a literal sense, but every one means by them the Divine most exact knowledge and discernment of things, to which our low and imperfect manner of perceiving by corporeal organs, bears some analogy. He that *made the eye* of man, to convey to him such a representation and knowledge of external objects as is not compleat and thoroughly comprehensive of their nature, but accommodated to the purposes of our present state, and proportionate to the other imperfect faculties of the human mind; *he*, the Maker, *sees*, not in a strict and proper sense as we do, but understands all things in a more eminent and perfect manner. He that *made the ear*, the instrument by which are convey'd to us, the sentiments and desires of our fellow-creatures moving our affections; *he*, in a superior and more perfect way, knows and understands the sentiments and desires of all intelligent beings, whether conceiv'd only in the mind or express'd by the mouth. In like manner as the human strength and power of operation are exerted by the means of arms and hands, these bodily organs are figuratively attributed to God to denote his Almighty power; tho' it is exercised by him in a quite different manner, which we cannot comprehend, but we are sure it is not like tedious and laborious human operation.

In a special manner it is to be observed, that many of the springs of action in embodied spirits, setting their powers at work, and which we are conscious of in ourselves, tho' they are analogically attributed to the infinite eternal Mind, yet do not properly belong to him. The wise Author of our constitution has seen fit to mix in it, with superior faculties, some lower appetites and passions, which powerfully excite us to pursue the ends of our nature in the present imperfect state. Our minds are furnished with determinations which tend to the preservation of the body, and to the comfort and happiness of the animal life: we have desires

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desires and affections which rise no higher in their design; and we have passions which are excited by, and accompanied with certain motions in the body. But the divine purely spiritual nature is infinitely above these infirmities. Some of the heathens were so gross as to think the gods capable of sensual desires, and pleasure in the gratification of them; and perhaps there are others who imagine something like human passions in the Deity, and particularly the passions of pity, hatred, anger and grief. Indeed the Scripture itself speaks of God's hating the wicked, of his bowels of compassion mov'd for distressed creatures, and of his anger and grief. But these expressions are only us'd in the same figurative manner of speaking as when the bodily organs of sense and motion are ascrib'd to him, and we should be far from thinking there are any such emotions in his most blessed and perfect mind, as we feel in our selves arising from things surprising or disagreeable to us. A little reflection will convince us, that such passions show the imperfection of our state, and a mixture of unhappiness in it; and therefore they cannot possibly affect the infinite self-sufficiency, the undisturb'd rest and the perfect felicity of the supreme independent Being. When therefore he is spoken of as having indignation, compassion, anger or grief, it is only to be understood as an analogical representation of his conduct as governour of the world towards his creatures. What men would do when they are compassionate, angry or grieved, that God does, or produces a similar effect, with unerring wisdom, perfect tranquillity and goodness, without the weakness of pity, the sensation of sorrow, or perturbation of wrath.

Again, an unchangeable life or absolute immortality, is a property belonging to the Divine nature as it is spiritual. Our spirits are subject to pains and changes in their condition, from the body and otherwise; other spirits of a higher order may be so too in various degrees; but the most perfect Spirit is infinitely above the reach of sufferings, and infinitely remote from all

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possibility of change. Such is the absolute simplicity of his Being, free from any mixture or composition, there are no seeds or principles of decay *within* him, nor can he suffer from any thing *without*. We find by experience, that our compounded natures, made up of different parts, are liable to dissolution; it is the more simple spiritual part of our constitution that shall outlive the present state, and being dislodg'd of the earthly tabernacle, shall subsist separately. But there is a great difference between our immortality and God's: Ours, as we were *created for his good pleasure*, continually depends upon it, and may cease if he pleases; but it is impossible he should not be the *living* God, the same immutable Spirit, *yesterday and to day and for ever*.

I shall only add, as the foundation of the improvement I propose to make of this subject, and which the text leads us to, namely, the regulating of our worship; That the Deity is not resembled by any sensible forms; His nature and attributes are alike essentially different from all the properties and qualities of matter, and no one part of it makes any nearer approaches to him than another. He is not to be touched or handled, and *no man hath seen him at any time, nor can see him*. The most subtle æther, or the purest light, is no image of his spiritual substance; and the human shape is no more a true representation of God than the shape of any other animal, nay, than a clod of earth or any other inanimate thing. It was therefore wisely provided by the Lawgiver of the *Jews*, (whose principal care seems to have been the preserving of their worship from idolatry,) that no image should be made of the Godhead; and he gives the reason for it, that in all the miraculous appearances and extraordinary manifestations God had ever vouchsafed to them, (and they were very many,) they had never seen any *similitude*; there was never any handle given them for so absurd and gross a conceit, as that the Deity is like any visible being in the whole world. We read often
of

of God's discovering his glory to them, as at the giving of the law, by a prodigious tempest, thunder and fire; and in their march thro' the wilderness, by a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire in the night, which were called the tokens of his *presence*; tho' really he is alike present in all places. Such astonishing things were apt to strike the minds even of very stupid people with a sense of his interposition in their behalf; and that his care and power were employ'd for them. But still there was no determinate shape, no figure of any abiding sensible object, imitable by human art, whereby they should have the least countenance or occasion given them, to make an image of their God, or *change his glory into the likeness of any creature*. It is true, we read sometimes in the old Testament of divine appearances in a human form. Thus God is said to have *spoken to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend*; and of the three angels which appeared to *Abraham* in the likeness of men, before the destruction of *Sodom*, one was distinguish'd by the peculiar veneration of that eminent saint, as of a superior character. But this seems to be rightly understood by interpreters concerning the *Messias*, that divine Person who was in *the form of God*, before his incarnation. Several passages of the Old Testament and the New compar'd together, plainly intimate that he was with the *Israelites*, conducting them as the divine *Presence*, and the *Angel of the covenant*, in whom *the name of God* was. *St. Stephen*, in the 7th of the *Acts*, speaking of God's appearing to *Moses* in the burning bush, and saying with an audible voice, *I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*; *St. Stephen*, I say expressly attributes this to the person whom he calls the *Angel of the Lord*, and who *was with Moses in the church in the wilderness*. And the Apostle *Paul** mentioning the sins and punishments of the *Israelites* in the wilderness, for an *admonition to us on whom the ends of the world are come*, clearly insinuates that *Christ* was pre-

* 1 Cor. x.

sent with them directing their affairs; for he says *,
*neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted,
 and were destroyed of serpents.* Thus as our Lord
 Jesus Christ, *the image of the invisible God, in the ful-
 ness of time, assum'd the human nature, the word was
 made flesh and dwelt with us* as in a tabernacle, mani-
 festing *the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full
 of grace and truth.* Before his incarnation he acted
 with full power, representing his Father in his trans-
 actions with men; *by him God made the world, and by
 him govern'd the church:* But the Divine nature it-
 self, the essence of the supreme Being is invisible; *to
 whom is God like, or whereunto can he be resembled?*

I shall in the next place, consider the practical
 purpose to which our Saviour has gone before us, in
 applying this important doctrine of natural religion
 asserted in the text, namely, the regulating our wor-
 ship. First of all, we may see the absurdity of that
 practice which great multitudes of mankind have run
 into, the forming corporeal images of the Deity as
 mediums of worship. The worshipping of false
 gods, that is beings, whether real or imaginary, to
 which Divinity is falsely attributed, is an error against
 other religious principles, either against the existence
 of the true God, or his unity: But this species of
 idolatry, so early introduc'd into the world, and
 which so generally prevail'd in it for many ages, is
 a most direct and heinous indignity to the spiritual
 Divine nature. The unreasonableness of it, one
 would think, might easily appear to men, if they
 did but seriously reflect on themselves. For how just
 and evidently conclusive is St. Paul's argument to
 the *Athenians?* Acts xvii. 29. *Forasmuch then as we
 are the offspring of God;*—we intelligent creatures,
 conscious of intellectual and self-determining powers,
 and of noble affections which do not terminate on
 sensible objects, but on spiritual and moral excel-
 lence;—*we ought not to think that the Godhead is like*

* 1 Cor. x. v. 9.

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unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art or man's device. What man is so far lost to a just sense of the dignity of his nature, as not to know that the vital principle within him of thought, of choice, of sublime desire, of rational and moral pleasure, is far more-noble than a whole world of corporeal inanimate beings? And should we then so affront the Father of our spirits, from whom all their excellence is deriv'd, himself the original and purest Spirit, as to imagine he is like any material and corruptible thing?

Superstition grew by degrees in the world, to such a height of stupidity and barbarity, as was reproachful to the intelligent human nature; but the beginnings of it were more refin'd and plausible. The first idols probably were the sun, moon and stars, not as the ultimate objects of worship, but as the suppos'd habitations of the Deity, the visible instruments and magnificent representations of his power and goodness: But afterwards those creatures themselves were *honour'd besides the Creator*, and were admitted to a participation of the respect due to him. For such is the weakness of men's minds, and if they do not carefully watch against it, their attention is so easily ingross'd by the objects of sense continually before them, and which they find useful, that they forget things of vastly greater excellence and moment, which require careful reflection to preserve a lively sense of them. They proceeded next to the deifying of departed Heroes, imagining that their virtues were rewarded with an exaltation to a high dignity in the other world, and that they were even taken into a share of the divine administration, still having an affectionate remembrance of their friends and their country, to which they had been useful upon earth. As these men, suppos'd to be advanc'd to Godhead, were of mixt characters, the idea of the Divine moral purity and perfection began to be alter'd, and vices had their patrons among the Gods, till at length ignorance and corruption still increasing, some of them

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were worshipped with the most obscene and inhuman rites. Even brute animals of several kinds, and vegetables too became idols; and in fine, whatever recommended itself to the affections of men by its usefulness, and whatever was dreaded by them because it might be hurtful, was worshipped. Thus we see that the tendency of departing from the simplicity of a reasonable service, is to the most absurd opinions and practices, as opposite to real religion as *Atheism* itself is: In this respect worse, because they destroy humanity, and under the pretence of devotion, give a sanction to those crimes which nature itself, abstracting from any consideration of God, would abhor. Every kind of idolatry, even the most refin'd, and for which the best excuses are made, (such as, that worship is not intended to terminate on the inferior beings, sensible objects or others, before which it is offered, but that they are only us'd as helps to devotion, preserving still a higher regard for God, who is the ultimate object of adoration;) every kind of idolatry, I say, is founded in falshood, as the natural progress of it is to the utter subversion of all true piety and virtue. It proceeds from, or imports such notions as these, which are contrary to the absolute perfection of the divine, immense and spiritual Being, That the presence of God is confin'd to some particular parts of the universe, to the sun, the stars or some eminently sacred place upon earth; and that he can possibly be represented by some visible similitude; or that there are some material objects which give us a truer and juster idea of his nature than others. It is therefore necessary above all things, in order to the practice of true religion, and persevering in it, that we endeavour by a constant and diligent attention, to fix in our minds becoming sentiments concerning the Deity, as a most pure and perfect Spirit.

I have said that idolatry (which in all its forms, even the most innocent of them, is an error against the doctrine of the text) tends to corrupt the tempers

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and the manners of men; but the observation deserves to be farther considered, and we may see it justified by the constant experience of the world. *St. Paul*, in the first chapter of his epistle to the *Romans*, teaches us concerning the Gentiles, and their own histories confirm it, that tho' they knew God, (for his works proclaim his being and perfections intelligibly to all mankind,) and their first and most natural sentiments concerning him were the best; yet not liking to retain him in their knowledge, they chang'd his truth into a lie, that is, into idolatry, built upon a false foundation, and repugnant to the real nature of the Deity. In consequence of which, they were abandon'd to such monstrous and unnatural wickedness, as nothing could have drawn them into but their idolatrous superstition. And we find that the declensions of the *Jews* to impiety and wickedness, began with inventing means and instruments of service to the true God; but from thence proceeded to grosser kinds of superstition, which at last extinguished all sense of virtue and humanity, carrying them to the unnatural cruelty of sacrificing their own children to *Moloch*. Even among Christians themselves, superstition has had very lamentable effects; some of them not only substituting their false worship in the place of virtue, and making atonement by it for their sins, but being led by a blind zeal for their own inventions, to such barbarity, as men, without a pretence of religion, would never have been guilty of.

2dly, Since God is a spirit, we can never reasonably hope to please him by merely corporeal things or bodily exercises. There are, 'tis true, external acts of homage and adoration necessary to be perform'd to God. In our present state the affections of the mind are naturally express'd by outward actions. Benevolence, esteem, gratitude, and other dispositions towards our fellow-creatures, are not silent and unactive in the heart. Nature and custom have thought us the proper expressions whereby they shew them-

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selves; and if *these* be altogether omitted, we shall scarcely believe the inward principles have a being. By parity of reason, if we have internal good affections towards the Deity, the sincerity and the force of them appear by proper outward acts. But the sincerity of intention, and truly pious affections can only be acceptable to God. Without these no forms of devotion or seemingly religious works, however pompous, expensive and magnificent, are of any value at all. Such formal service not proceeding from just sentiments, nor animated by inward good affections, is unworthy of our rational spirits to perform, and unworthy of the divine Spirit to accept. What notion can any man have of the Deity, who imagines that sacrifices and other ceremonious performances will please him, when separated from virtuous dispositions and a good life? The question which the *Psalmist* puts in the name of God to the formal worshipper, is a very proper one, *Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* * For, however absurd that be, no better account can be given of the hypocrite's spiritless devotion, who is laborious in the forms and ceremonies of worship, but utterly negligent of moral duties, which alone he has any reason to think, can recommend him to the approbation of a pure spirit. *God does not see as man sees*; he has not those views of sensible things, nor those affections and desires to them which we have. Will he be delighted with a fine picture or an expensive statue? Are gold and silver more precious to him than common earth? Has he ears like ours, to be delighted with the melody of sounds? These are gross imaginations, unworthy of reasonable beings. Strange! that ever it should enter into the heart of a man, that he could reconcile himself to God by *thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil*, or that *offering the fruit of his body* could expiate his crimes. And yet it is certain, there is such a proneness in mankind to this sort of

* *Psal.* l. 13.

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superstition, that not only they have been guilty of it who had no other guide than the light of nature, trespassing thereby against the plain dictates of reason, and particularly this important principle that God is a Spirit; but even they who enjoy'd the benefit of a divine revelation, have, many of them fallen into the same error, contrary to the most express warnings and reproofs given them by God's extraordinary messengers. Many of the ancient *Jews* plac'd their religion in sacrifices and other ceremonial observances, in which they trusted as sufficient to recommend them to the divine acceptance, and to make amends for the want of true repentance and reformation, notwithstanding the most express declarations of the prophets, that no external service, tho' of divine institution, would be acceptable to God, without purity of heart and the practice of righteousness. The prophet *Jeremy* tells them *, that to trust in the *temple of the Lord* for their security, whilst they did not amend their lives, was to trust in *lying words*. He puts them in mind of the desolation that was brought upon *Shiloh* for the wickedness of their fathers, tho' it was a place once as sacred, and the presence of God was there, as conspicuously as afterwards in the house which was built for him in *Jerusalem*; and by that remarkable example in their own history, he warns them that the temple would be no protection to them, if they continued in their crimes: Nay, while they were guilty of murder, adultery, oppression, fraud, perjury and idolatry, their entrance into the temple as worshippers was a profanation of it, and turning the *house of God into a den of thieves and robbers*. But if they would please God and be intitled to the accomplishment of the promises made to their fathers, they must thoroughly *amend their ways and their doings, they must execute judgment between a man and his neighbour, they must not oppress the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, nor shed in*

* Chap. vii. v. 4.

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nocent blood, neither walk after other gods *. The declarations of the prophet *Isaiah* are as clear and strong against their vain confidence in their sacrifices and religious assemblies, at their new moons, sabbaths and other festivals, Chap. i. 11. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord.—I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of the assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting: But wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, plead for the widow.*

I wish *Christians* were not chargeable with the same fault; but it is certain many of them are. Tho' our Saviour has taken great care to give his followers just notions of the divine nature, and on that foundation to raise a reasonable service; and tho' the *Christian* worship has the characters of plainness and simplicity in a more eminent degree than any other form ever had, yet has it been greatly corrupted by some *Christians*: Especially the church of *Rome* has multiplied her rites and ceremonies to a greater number, and thereby made her service more burthensome than the *Jewish* institution itself was. If it was absurd in the worshippers of *Baal* to think that they could prevail with their God by cutting themselves with lances, is it not equally absurd in *Christians*, and much more inexcusable, to imagine that their God, whom they acknowledge to be a pure Spirit, will hear them for their speaking much; will be pleased with their vain repetition of formal insipid devotion, which is the exercise of the body and not of the mind; with postures and vestments which carnal worshippers have devised, as fondly fancying a kind of humility and decency in them; or with fastings, pilgrimages, and

* Ver. 5, 6.

such like severities, which God has not commanded, and which instead of promoting repentance and true holiness, are relied upon in place of them; thus *making void the precepts of the moral law*, which are of eternal and immutable obligation?

Other *Christians* make too near approaches to the same kind of superstition, who place their religion in points of mere speculation, in a zeal for matters of small importance, or in positive duties, a diligent attendance on assemblies for worship, receiving the sacrament and such like outward performances. *These things ought not to be left undone*, because God has prescrib'd them; but they are enjoin'd to intelligent creatures, and the uses and designs of them are fully explain'd. In general they are all intended for the promoting of good dispositions in men, and the practice of virtue; and we may be assured our observance of them is no farther pleasing to God, than as they are, this way, useful to ourselves. Therefore to lay any stress on positive institutions, as if by any merit or efficacy in them, they could procure our acceptance with God, or in some other unintelligible manner, do us good, without contributing to our instruction, the exciting good affections in our minds and our progress in piety, righteousness and charity;— This is to alter the very nature of them, to separate the means from the end to which God appointed to be subservient, and to abuse his ordinances to superstition, which cannot be pleasing to him who is himself perfectly intelligent, and delights in the reasonable service of his creatures. And to conclude,

Lastly, If God is a Spirit, our duty in consequence of this principle, and in opposition to the errors already mention'd, is to *worship him in spirit and truth*, that is, with sincerity, with our best affections, and the most vigorous exercise of our inward powers. We cannot but have an abhorrence and contempt in our minds of hypocrisy. Any professions of respect to ourselves which we know to be insincere, and not

to proceed from the heart, we would certainly reject with detestation as real affronts. And shall we then offer such an indignity to the omniscient Spirit? But if we consider what the service is, which our own minds upon calm and deliberate reflexion approve, we shall thereby understand what is acceptable to God. It is the homage of the heart, the inward devotion of the soul and affections, with serious attention, proceeding from clear apprehensions and a firm persuasion of his adorable perfections, and evidencing its sincerity in our whole conversation by the fruits of holiness; it is an humble reverence for, and high esteem of his glorious excellencies, gratitude for his benefits, confidence in his mercy, submission to his will, and an imitation of his purity and goodness. Wherefore, *let sinners cleanse their hands, and the double-minded purify their hearts; and thus, if they draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to them.*

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D I S-

DISCOURSE IV.

The Unity of God prov'd from the apparent Unity of Design in his Works.

[ABERNETHY.]

Deuteronomy vi. 4.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

SINCE we are convinc'd by the most full and satisfying evidence, that the system of the universe is intellectual, or that the formation of the world and all its parts is to be attributed to a designing Cause ; our next inquiry is, where shall that wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding ? Whether in a plurality of beings, co-ordinate and independent, or in one original perfect mind ? That intelligence and activity are seated in a mind as their proper subject, we know. For the knowledge we have of what passes in ourselves, teaches us to distinguish between perception and a percipient, between operation and power, as the principle from which it proceeds ; and that mind is a being or substance different from matter, especially that spirituality must necessarily be implied in original intelligence, has been prov'd. The present question is not, whether there are other orders of understanding agents, superior to men, which may be easily allow'd upon all suppositions. For tho' our own reason does not furnish

nish us with demonstrative proof of it, yet who can find any difficulty in supposing, (even if the world were made by chance, and there were no intending Cause in the origin of things,) that there are many minds, and many different species of them, whose capacities are much larger than ours, who have a much more comprehensive knowledge, and a far less limited sphere of action; whose manner and extent of perception transcends ours, as much as we in understanding surpass the brutal kinds; and their activity may reach to vast quantities of matter, whereas we are confin'd to a small part of it, and very unfit for great operations. And as there are many different kinds of spirits with very different degrees of perfection; those who maintain the unity of God, the first independent Cause and supreme Ruler of the universe, do not at all doubt of his employing such inferior spiritual agents, as the ministers of his providence. But the question properly is concerning the original Cause of things, and the monarchy of the world; whether there be one supreme intelligent Being, to whom all other Beings owe their existence and all their powers, and who has an absolute dominion over all, the fountain of being, of understanding and power; or whether there be a variety of partial, independent, unmade causes of the universe, and all its appearances?

This last is most properly call'd *Polytheism*, but it has been exploded by the generality of men who have thought on this subject with any tolerable degree of attention. And indeed, the idea of a Deity, as it is explain'd both by those who assert and oppose his existence, naturally leads us to attribute singularity to him; to appropriate that character to *one*, and exclude all others from a partnership in his perfections and prerogatives. For the notion of God is of an absolutely perfect, uncaus'd, and therefore necessarily existent Being, on whom all things depend, by his intelligence directing, and by his powerful will producing

ducing whatever actually is, the whole frame of nature with all the kinds and degrees of order and perfection which it contains. Now the true subject of controversy between us and *Atheists*, is concerning the existence of such a Being: We believe that the phenomena of the world cannot otherwise be accounted for; they maintain the contrary. But there is no appearance of reason for a plurality; the doctrine of *Theism* does not require it; for the Being of one God absolutely perfect, is fully sufficient to all its purposes. The *Atheistical* scheme opposes the unity of God; in fact the arguments of the *Atheists* are level'd against it; and in reason, a multitude of independent agents ununited in design and operation, so diminishes the idea of absolute perfection, and so dissipates and enervates the ruling counsel of the universe, as to sap the foundations of religion, and leave *Atheism* little to quarrel with. *Epicurus* himself, a violent adversary to the Being of the true God, the Maker of all things, yet imagin'd a multitude of independent Deities; consistently enough with his principles, excepting in one circumstance, that he said they were incorruptible, which can never be reconcil'd to his hypothesis, that all things, and even the Gods, were generated by the casual encounter of atoms. But of what sort were these Deities? Only idle unactive beings, who liv'd in pleasure, without any share in the formation of the world, or in presiding over it. And the truth is, to suppose a plurality of partial independent causes, under no common direction, almost leaves the origin of things in the same confusion, and signifies as little to the purposes of religion as the fiction of *Epicurus* *.

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* If it should be supposed, that there may possibly be a plurality of eternal independent beings, the makers of the world, to whom the characters of necessary existence and absolute perfection belong, and consequently, who must be united in all their counsels and operations; for that infinitely perfect intellectual powers should differ, is a manifest absurdity: This hypothesis is imagin'd without any necessity,

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The *Polytheism* of the *Gentiles* seems to be a strong argument against what I have said. It is notoriously known, that before the times of *Christianity*, mankind universally, all but the *Jews*, worshipped *many Gods* and *many Lords*; and not only the ignorant vulgar, but even the most eminent philosophers. How then can it be alledged that there has been any thing like an agreement, among the wise themselves, in believing the unity of God? I answer, that upon a careful inquiry into the history of ancient times, it appears indeed that learned men complied with the superstition of their several countries; but at the same time strenuously argued for, and profess'd to believe one supreme Being, the absolute Lord of all; inso-much, that if we except the *Epicureans*, there is not one philosopher of note, who asserted a multitude of independent gods. There are clear authentic testimonies, still remaining, which fully prove that the most celebrated authors among the *Persians*, the *Greeks*, and even the *Egyptians*, the most idolatrous of all nations, asserted that there is one unoriginated, self-existent Cause, to whom they gave the characters of the GREATEST and the BEST, the Maker of all things, the Father of gods and men. The poets themselves, the great depravers of the *Pagan* theology, filling it with fables, yet plainly and frequently declar'd this truth.

sity, (all appearances being at least, as well accounted for on the contrary supposition of unity;) and supported by no argument. Besides, as multiplicity, at least possible, naturally accompanies the idea of effects, whose contingent existence and limited perfection are determined by the power and will of the designing Cause: so the idea of necessary existence and unlimited perfection seems to exclude all diversity of being. And how can it be thought that a plurality of independent, infinitely perfect beings, essentially immense, all-powerful and all-knowing, should divest themselves of these perfections, or the exercise of them, by dividing among them the formation and government of the world, for which every one singly is allowed to be sufficient. But as no such opinion is maintain'd, so far as I know, by any adversaries of religion, nor would at all serve their purposes; I shall not insist any farther upon it, but endeavour to prove unity of design in the frame and government of the world, which is the just foundation of our pious affectionate regards to the Deity.

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There are various accounts given of the *Heathen Polytheism*, or worshipping a plurality of gods, whereby it appears to be consistent with the acknowledgment of one supreme, undivided Monarchy of the universe. As *First*, That the one eternal and self-existent Deity was the ultimate Object of their adoration, under different names. Thus *Pan*, and *Janus*, and *Jupiter*, and *Cælus*, and *Saturn*, and *Pluto*, and *Apollo*, and *Minerva*,----these and other Deities, so called, (however the true notion of them may be disguised by the fabulous inventions of the poets, and even pretended histories given of their originals and acts, which represent them as so many derived and temporary beings,) yet the testimonies collected by *Christian* writers, who have search'd accurately into this matter, from the most sensible *Pagans*, plainly shew that these several names did not signify different gods: For that they had each the characters of the universal *Numen* ascrib'd to them, tho' the superstitious and credulous vulgar imagin'd a diversity, which false imagination was industriously cherish'd among them for political reasons. Nor is it an argument of any weight to the contrary, that some of the names were also used to denote particular parts of the visible world, as the heavens, the sun, the earth and the sea. For this only shews that their theology was obscured, as it certainly was by a multitude of ambiguous words in it; not that the wisest among them did not intend by these very words, that their devotion should terminate on the great God, the Creator of heaven and earth, which themselves expressly say they did.

It is further alledged, and very probably true, that many of the *Heathens* designed by their different denominations to signify, not distinct beings, but partial considerations of the supreme Deity, as manifesting himself by his various works. The vast multitude of creatures which are produc'd, and the numberless variety of appearances in the world, (tho' all proceeding from the same original Cause,) might give weak minds

occasion

occasion to imagine a diversity of operating and governing principles; yet others really meant, and explain'd themselves as meaning, no more than a diversity of effects. Thus, tho' the *Pagan* worship might seem at first sight to be divided between the Divinity presiding in the heavens, in the sun, the moon, the air, the earth, the sea, and the invisible state of separate spirits; yet the wiser sort intended it to the one supreme God, to whose dominion the whole world is subject, whom they believed to be every where present, pervading all things, as they express'd themselves, and diffusing the fruits of his power, wisdom, and liberality thro' all parts of the universe. And therefore when the inanimate parts of the creation were personated, and deified, such as the sun and the earth, we cannot reasonably think that, at least the men of sense and learning among the *Heathens*, were so stupid as to imagine that the material systems themselves were proper objects of religious invocation; but the true meaning was either that they were animated by subordinate intelligences, whom they honoured with an inferior worship, as I shall afterwards observe, or rather that the sovereign virtues of this Deity, tho' one in the principle, yet multiform in their apparent exertions, were to be reverently acknowledged wherever they are manifested. From the deifying of the works of nature, as containing so many different manifestations of the Divine power and providence, they proceeded farther to make gods of unsubstantial things, mere accidents, such as the qualities, the affections and passions of the human mind; virtue, justice, clemency, hope, had temples consecrated to them and altars erected. Not surely that these were thought to be personal deities, subsisting by themselves, but it was designed to be acknowledged, that in them the Author of nature has display'd his virtues, giving a moving force to created beings, whereby important effects are produc'd in the world.

If this was the true sense of the more intelligent

Pagans, (and by the many quotations which learned men have taken the pains to collect from their writings, it seems to be so,) we must conclude, that under an appearance of *Polytheism*, they conceal'd a real persuasion concerning the real unity of God. And this will be still more evident, if we consider what I observ'd on another occasion, that some of them worshipp'd the Deity as the Soul of the world, than which, however wrong in itself, nothing can give us a clearer idea of unity, or a stronger intimation that they believed it. For as we know by our own consciousness, that the human soul is one percipient active being; so a common soul, animating the whole system of the universe, must be apprehended to be one. I have already shewn, that this notion was gross and unworthy of the supreme Being. It is probable, that many of the philosophers who thus express'd their sentiments, intended no more than that the Divine reason, as they spoke, or understanding, is intimately present with all things, wisely governing them. Some of them certainly had more sublime conceptions of the Deity, as an infinitely superior nature, the Author of the world, inhabiting it not as a Soul, but as a sovereign Ruler, who continually superintends all its affairs, and exercises a just and gracious care over them; and some of them imagin'd a plastic and intelligent universal nature, deriv'd from him, which was properly the Soul of the world, and they called it a secondary God. But however divided their opinions might be as to that point, they agreed in this, that the supreme Deity, the ultimate Object of worship, is One only, manifested in the several parts of the universe, either as his animated members, or his works, in which he is intimately present, continually displaying his wisdom, power and goodness; so that he *containeth all things in himself*, and *all things are full of him*, which they carried so far, that this was not an uncommon saying with them, *Deus unus et omnia*.

Lastly, It is certain that the *Pagans*, the wisest and most

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most learned of them, designedly and avowedly worshipped inferior gods, substantial invisible powers, whom they supposed to be created or generated by the one supreme Being, either in time or from eternity, and employ'd by him as the ministers of his providence. These Deities were of several sorts, as separate spirits of various orders and degrees of perfection, who never inhabited terrestrial bodies, but were either altogether incorporeal, or possess'd only aerial or ætherial vehicles, each presiding over a particular part of the universe, as the station and province appointed to him by the universal King; and the departed souls of heroes, whom they supposed to be advanc'd to a high degree of power, dignity and happiness, as a reward of their virtues, and the eminent services they had done to mankind, while they were upon earth.

The pretences by which the *Heathens* justified this part of their devotion were such as these; that since there are so many excellent beings, subordinate indeed to the great God, and his servants, but superior to men, and by whose ministry many and great benefits are convey'd to them, it seems reasonable that their favours should be acknowledg'd with gratitude, and that they should be honoured by men, in proportion to their dignity and beneficence. Besides, that as there is an infinite distance between the supreme Majesty, and mortals dwelling upon earth, it seems fit that they should not presume to approach his presence immediately with their adorations, but by the mediation and intercession of his favourite ministers, who continually stand before him and surround his throne. In both these sorts of worship, I mean the supreme and inferior, they used ceremonies and external symbols, especially sacrifices and images: Sacrifices, as testimonies of gratitude and acknowledgments of dependence, likewise bloody victims, as rites of deprecation, and for expiating their sins; and they used images, not as at all participating in their worship, (at least the more intelligent pretended so,)

so,) but only to make a more sensible impression on their minds, and thereby help their devotion. Besides, some of the *Pagans* did, and some do at this day, pay a kind of religious respect to evil dæmons, from no principle but that of servile fear, intending to appease, at least mitigate their malice, and elcaped the harm which otherwise they might and are inclined to do; or else, men, having themselves mischievous designs, implore the assistance of wicked spirits in accomplishing them. But many others utterly disclaim this, as impious and altogether unworthy of men, who acknowledge the supreme dominion of a good God over the world, whose providence directs the whole series of events; and tho' it may permit malevolent creatures to exert their power and execute malicious designs in some instances, yet always permits them only for wise reasons, and over-rules the issue for good.

What I have said concerning the *Pagan* theology and worship, is not at all intended to excuse the errors and corruption of it. It is impossible to vindicate idolatry, or giving divine honour to others besides the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth; as the scripture speaks, *worshipping the creature besides the Creator who is blessed for evermore*. For that is certainly to rebel against the clear light of reason, whereby he discovers himself to us, requiring that we should glorify him as God; that is, that we should dutifully recognise his peerless Majesty, and pay him an homage which cannot possibly be due to other beings in any degree, on account of his not only unequal'd but incommunicable excellency, as the sole self-originated fountain of all being, power, wisdom and goodness. To adore the Deity as the Soul of the universe, is to confound him with his creatures, and to disparage his absolute perfection by jumbling it into one composition with the most imperfect of all things. To worship him under the partial consideration of particular benefits communicated to us, as by the
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fun, the earth, corn and wine, is to lead unthoughtful men, (as in fact it probably did lead many of the vulgar *Heathen*,) into that most stupid notion, that these creatures themselves are original Deities; which is rather *Atheism* than any kind of religion: And to serve angels or the departed spirits of good men religiously, as it is liable to the same inconvenience with the particular last mentioned, namely, ensnaring weak minds into that most pernicious error of attributing independent Divinity to them; it has no foundation in reason, since we know not what communication those separate spirits have with us, or what knowledge of our affairs, nor have we any ground to believe it is acceptable to them; rather on the contrary, that they are displeas'd with it, as an affront to the God whose servants they are, and before whom they prostrate themselves with the humblest reverence. Besides, the *Gentile* worship, wrong in its foundation, as contrary to plain reason, was still more deprav'd by the craft of priests and politicians, who fram'd it to their own selfish purposes, not without the secret concurrence of evil spirits, intending mischief to mankind, by ensnaring them into vice and unhappiness, under the specious pretence of religion. By these means the devotion of the greatest part of mankind grew to a monstrous absurdity, some of it at least so irrational, so foul, barbarous and obscene, as to be a disgrace to the human nature; and in consequence of it, as *St. Paul* very well observes in the first Chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*, they were wretchedly debased in their morals, running into the most enormous and unnatural crimes. But however inexcusable the *Heathen* idolatry was, from the observations which have been made, I think it evidently appears, that amidst all the corruptions which prevail'd, and notwithstanding the strong appearances of *Polytheism*, still that grand principle of natural religion was maintain'd by the most understanding and thoughtful men, that there is one only living and

eternal God, and they endeavoured to explain their worship in a consistency with it.

It is not to be dissembled however, that there has been a real difference upon this head among professed *Theists*, nay, among professed *Christians*; some have asserted that there are two eternal, unmade, independent Principles, one good and the other evil; which opinion others have rejected as a very great error. The philosopher of greatest note who maintained the being of an eternal evil dæmon, the author of all the mischief and disorder that is in the world, was *Plutarch* the celebrated moralist. He pretends indeed, that he was not singular in this notion, but that some of the most learned among the *Persians* and *Egyptians*, as well as *Greeks*, especially *Plato*, went before him in it; which in all probability is a mistake, at least with respect to *Plato*, and the other eminent *Grecians*. For the sentiments of the *Persian Magi*, it is more doubtful, whether *Arimanius*, whom their theology represented as the head of the opposition to goodness, were understood by them to be a substantial, unmade, independent principle or not. Among the sects of profess'd *Christians*, almost every one knows that *Manes* and his followers were charg'd with this error, (and from him it bears the name of *Manicheism* to this day;) how justly, it is hard to determine, for it is certain that the history of ancient heresies is involv'd in great darkness. However that be, the grounds of the opinion are of much greater importance, and more necessary to be considered than the history of its rise and progress. Now what gave the principal, I may say, the only occasion to it, was the difficulty, and as the abettors of it alledge, the impossibility of accounting otherwise for the origin of evil. Shall we, say they, attribute all the good that is in the world to a good author, and from his works infer his being and his moral character, which is allow'd to be a just way of reasoning; and shall we not, in like manner, impute the evil that is in the world, to an evil cause? Or is it to be imagined, that a being essentially good,

would

would have produc'd or even permitted, when it was in his power to have prevented, so much wickedness and so much unhappiness as we see among mankind? It is plain, that the point thus stated is not proper for our present consideration, because it is apparently an objection against the goodness of God, and we have not yet proceeded so far in our inquiry as to any of his moral perfections. I shall therefore wave it at this time, and only argue against the *Ditheistic* scheme, as well as *Polytheism*, from the foundations already laid, that is, I will, in the remaining part of this discourse, consider whether the proofs which have been adduc'd from the being of God, or an universal, designing and active intelligence in the world, will lead us this one step farther, to conclude the unity of that intelligence or not?

The only argument which has been insisted on for the existence of a Deity, or an intelligent Cause of all things, is taken from the evidence of design in the formation of the universe, and its several parts; in the obvious and most common appearances of the material system, such as the variety and uniformity, which upon the slightest view, we cannot but observe in the works of nature, the apparent harmony and order of our world, and the mutual relation of its parts, as the heavens, the air and the terraqueous globe, divided into collections of waters and dry land, in each of which are numerous living inhabitants, suited by the frame and texture of their bodies to their proper elements; in the production of animals and their various kinds, preserv'd unmix'd, and propagated by a settled never-failing law; in the principal phænomena of the animal life, sensation and self-motion; and especially in the human understanding, its abstract notions, its knowledge of eternal truths, and above all its knowledge of morality, of so great and important use to the perfection of the intelligent Nature, and the common advantage of the whole species. Now if we review all these particulars and compare them together, we shall see that they discover not only design in the

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origin

origin and contrivance of them, but unity of design, and therefore that all things are derived from one eternal source of intelligence and activity, or one God. But I shall content myself with making a few remarks on some of them, especially on their mutual dependence and connexion, directing us to consider them as parts of one system, and consequently as proceeding from one intelligent Cause.

First, As gravity is the common quality of all bodies, arising not from the nature and properties of matter, nor to be explain'd without the agency of a foreign Cause, yet producing numberless uniform effects in the corporeal system; it is in all reason to be attributed to one contrivance, rather than the different designs of two or more partial independent causes. What a vast variety of appearances in nature depend on this one? The self-balanc'd earth hangs upon its centre; the mountains are set fast; there is a perpetual flux and reflux of the sea; vapours continually arise; the clouds are ballanced till by their own weight they descend in rain; animals breathe and move; the heavenly bodies hold their stations and go on in their constant course, by the force of gravity, after the *ordenance* of that wisdom which appointed them this law. Now when we see a multitude of effects proceeding from one Cause, effects so various in their kind and so important, a Cause simple and unvaried in all the diversity produc'd by it, can we avoid ascribing this to an unity of intelligence, if there be intelligence in it all? For could we suppose different independent beings, acting with different designs, and by distinct operations to have form'd the several parts of the world, and the several species of creatures which are in it, what reason can be imagin'd why they should all be govern'd by, and all necessarily depend upon one law? The Maker of the sun, or if a partial cause of nature could be suppos'd to have an understanding large enough for it, the Contriver of the whole visible heavens, must, one would think, have finished his scheme independently

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dently on any other, without borrowing aid from the work of another God. In like manner the Gods of the seas and of the dry land, and the Creator of animals would have compleated their several systems, each by itself, not depending on any other for its order and preservation. Whereas, on the contrary, we see in fact they are none of them independent, but all held together by the common bond of gravity. The heavens and the earth continue in their situations at a proper distance from each other by the force of this law; the sea keeps within its channels; and animals live and move by it. All which lead us to acknowledge one directing Counsel in the whole frame. For what but an understanding which comprehends the whole extent of nature, reaching from the utmost circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, could have fixed such a common law, so necessary to all its parts, that without it not one of them could subsist, nor the harmony of the whole be preserved? The strict cohesion of the parts which constitute particular bodies, requires a peculiar cement, different from that of the gravitating force; and as it can never be explain'd by the nature and properties of matter itself, and is absolutely necessary to the forms and the uses of bodies in the several far distant regions of the world, it must in like manner be attributed to the contrivance of an understanding, and the agency of a power which takes in the whole corporeal system; not to a partial Cause limited in its intelligence and operation.

2dly, The beautiful order and harmony of the universe, since it must be acknowledg'd to be the work of understanding, has all the appearance which is necessary to satisfy any fair inquirer, of its being form'd under the direction of our governing wisdom. Disconcerted counsels can never produce harmony. If a plurality of intelligent causes pursue each his separate design, disunion will continually cleave to their works; but when we see an intire piece made up of many parts, all corresponding to each other, and conspiring together

ther so as to answer one common end, we naturally conclude unity of design. As a work of art is formed according to the preconceived idea of a designing artificer, without which it has not its necessary intireness and uniformity, the same may be observ'd in the works of nature. A tree is as much one as a house; an animal as compleat a system in it self, (only much more curiously fram'd,) as a clock. If we carry our views farther into nature, and take in whole regions of the universe, with all their contents, the same characters of unity are still visible. The earth itself is not a confus'd mass, or a medley of incoherent and unrelated parts, but a well contrived fabric, fitted and plainly design'd for use. If we consider what a multitude of living creatures are in it of different kinds and degrees of perfection, each sort having proper apartments assign'd them, where they dwell conveniently together, with suitable provision made for them, and instincts directing them to the use of it; if we consider the interests of the several kinds, not interfering in the main, but rather serviceable to each other, furnished with necessary defences against the inconveniences to which they are liable, either by the preventing care of nature, which without any thought of their own has provided for their safety, by the appointed advantages of their situation, or by an implanted wisdom directing them to find out the means of it; and if we consider the constant interposition of the same liberal intelligent nature, appearing by the daily new productions from the same fertile womb of the earth, whereby the returning wants of animals are reliev'd with fresh supplies; all the species of living things having the common benefit of the air, without which they could not subsist, and the light of the sun, which cannot at once illuminate the whole globe, being dispensed among them with so good oeconomy, that they have every one what is sufficient to guide them in the exercise of their proper functions, that they may fulfil the purposes of their being;--when we consider

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all this, can we doubt but the earth is dispos'd and govern'd by one intending Cause? If in a large house, wherein are many mansions, and a vast variety of inhabitants, there appears exact order, all from the highest to the lowest continually attending their proper business, and all lodg'd and constantly provided for suitably to their several conditions; we find ourselves obliged to acknowledge one wise oeconomy. And if in a great city or commonwealth there be a perfectly regular administration, so that not only the whole society enjoys an undisturbed peace, but every member has the station assign'd him which he is best qualified to fill; the unenvied chiefs constantly attend their more important cares, serv'd by the busy inferiors, who have all a suitable accommodation, and food convenient for them, the very meanest ministering to the public utility and protected by the public care; if, I say, in such a community we must conclude there is a ruling Counsel, which if not naturally, yet is politically one, and unless united, could not produce such harmony and order; much more have we reason to recognize one governing Intelligence in the earth, in which there are so many ranks of beings dispos'd of in the most convenient manner, having all their several provinces appointed to them, and their several kinds and degrees of enjoyment liberally provided for, without encroaching upon, but rather being mutually useful to each other, according to a settled and obvious subordination. What else can account for this but a sovereign Wisdom, a common provident nature presiding over, and caring for the whole?

But the earth, as great as it appears to us, complicated in its frame, and having such a variety in its constitution, sustaining and nourishing so many tribes of animals, yet is not an intire system by it self, but has a relation to, and dependance on other parts of the universe, as well as the beings it contains have upon it. It owes its stability to the common law of gravitation; it derives its light and its heat from the sun,

by which it is render'd fruitful and commodious to its inhabitants. In short, a bond of union runs through the whole circle of being, as far as human knowledge reaches; and we have reason to make the same judgment concerning the parts of the world which we do not know, and to conclude that they all together compose one great whole, which naturally leads us to acknowledge one supreme uniting Intelligence. To object against this, the possibility of wild confusion reigning in worlds unknown, is to feign and not to argue; and to suppose disorder prevalent in an infinity of being which we are unacquainted with, which is the *Atheistic* hypothesis, is to take away all rational foundation for regularity any where, tho' we see it actually obtains every where, as far as our observation can reach. But confining our speculations on this subject within the compass of known existence, as we ought to do in a fair inquiry, the apparent order of the effects is a strong evidence of unity in the Cause. For if different independent causes produced, each a part, why are there no footsteps of this in the whole extent of nature? Why does not so much as one piece appear, as the separate monument of its author's power and wisdom? From divided counsels one would naturally expect interfering schemes; but on the contrary, we see an universal harmony. Men indeed from a sense of their indigence, and by the direction of instincts, which must be attributed to the designing author of their constitution, join in societies; which, tho' compos'd of many, are govern'd by one counsel: but that is only an artificial union, a submission to the majority, or to those who have the supreme power delegated to them, rather than an agreement in design. But this cannot be the case of independent beings, self-existent, and each compleat in itself, without relation to any other. And yet we see in nature a perfect harmony, from whence it is plain there must be an agreement at least in counsel and design, if we could suppose a plurality of independent causes. But whence

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comes this agreement? To say by chance, is *atheistically*, and very unreasonably to attribute the most perfect of all effects, universal order, to no cause at all. If we say by design, it must be one comprehensive design forming the whole scheme of nature and providence, which directly brings us to what we are looking for, one sovereign commanding Intelligence in the universe, or one God. This was the argument by which some of the ancient philosophers prov'd that there is one only eternal and independent Principle, the Fountain of being and the Author of all things. *Pythagoras* called it a *Monad*; and *Aristotle* argu'd from the phænomena that all things are plainly co-ordered, to one, the whole world conspiring into agreeing harmony: Whereas if there were many independent principles, the system of the world must needs have been incoherent and inconspiring; like an ill agreeing *drama*, botch'd up of many impertinent *intersections*. And he concludes that things are well administr'd, which they could not be under the government of many, alluding to the verse in *Homer*, *Οὐκ ἀγαθὸν Πολυκοιρανίη, εἰς Κοιρανὸς ἕστω.*

3dly, The condition and order of inferior, derived, and evidently dependent intelligent agents, shew not only intelligence, but unity of intelligence in the Cause of them. Every man, a single active conscious self, is the image of his Maker. There is in him one undivided animating principle; which in its perceptions and operations runs through the whole system of matter that it inhabits; it perceives for all the most distant parts of the body; it cares for all, and governs all, leading us, as a resemblance, to form an idea of the one great quickening Spirit which presides over the whole frame of nature, the spring of motion and all operation in it, understanding and active in all the parts of the universe, not as its soul indeed, but as its Lord, by whose vital directing influence it is, tho' so vast a bulk, and consisting of so many parts, united into one regular fabric. Again, the general apparent
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likeness which there is among all the individuals of the human kind, is a strong evidence of their being the children of one Father. I do not mean principally the similitude of the exterior form; (tho' even that, in reason, should be attributed to the direction of one intelligent Cause,) but that whereby we are especially God's offspring, our intellectual capacities, which as far as we can judge are very nearly alike. A great difference there may be, no doubt there is, in the improvement of them; but the powers themselves, and all the original modes of perception, in the different individuals of mankind, seem to resemble each other, as much as any real distinct things in nature. Now from a multitude, or a constant series of similar effects which do not arise from necessity, we infer unity of design in the Cause. So great a number of rational beings as the whole human race, dispos'd of in the same manner, endued with like faculties and affections, having many, and those principal things in their condition common, provided for out of the same fund and made for the same purposes, may reasonably be supposed to belong to one family; to be deriv'd from the same origin, and still under the same paternal care.

Above all, the moral capacity of mankind, which is a most important part of their constitution, tending to the highest perfection of their nature, and the principal bond of regular society among them, as it proceeds from a wise intending Cause, shews unity of wisdom in the Cause; and the government over the moral, as well as the natural world, evidently appears to be a monarchy. Since, as I observ'd before, a sense of good and evil in characters and actions is indelibly imprinted on every human heart; and there are affections of very great force, planted in our minds, whereby we are determin'd to act according to that sense; and since this is the effect of an original constitution, interwoven with the very frame of our nature, and no otherwise to be accounted for than by the design of its Author; let us see how this is to be

explain'd upon the contrary suppositions of one Supreme, or a plurality of independent governing minds. The evident tendency of virtue is not only to the private happiness of single persons, but the good of the whole kind; an universal benevolence links us together and interests every one of us in the affairs of another, so far as to desire and endeavour their safety and happiness, not inconsistently with our own. There are other particular determinations of the virtuous kind, such as compassion, natural affection, gratitude and the love of our country, so confessedly natural to men, as by common consent to obtain the name of humanity, but so prevalent in some as to put them upon the most self-denying and hazardous enterprizes, nay to sacrifice their private interests, even to their very lives, for the good of others; and these determinations of the human mind every one must see, do not center in itself, but that the ultimate intention and effect of them is to promote the good of the whole species. Now if we are thus form'd with design, and if this constitution be the result of intelligence, is it reasonable to attribute it to different intelligences, having different views, each framing and pursuing a several scheme, when the principal effect, which in a work of wisdom must be the principal intention, is not the separate good of one or a few, as it must have been upon the hypothesis of various independent causes, each caring for his own workmanship, but the common good of all? Or rather does not this view of the constitution, which is a very plain and natural one, pointing out its main end, evidently shew that the whole collective body of mankind, comprehending *all the nations of men, which are made of one blood to dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, is the family of one God, *the father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all*? It is true, there are found in men dispositions contrary to virtue, which produce effects hurtful to society, and destructive of the common peace and happiness; yet this does not prove a contrariety in the constitution, which must be attributed

attributed to the influence of opposite causes in the frame and contrivance of it. Whether these bad dispositions are an argument against the goodness of the Author, shall be consider'd in its proper place. In the mean time we may observe, that not only we have powerful instincts, whereby we are prompted to pursue the greatest universal happiness of mankind; but we are under the greatest necessity that voluntary agents can be under, of acting according to those instincts, because of the connexion our doing so has with our own happiness. For we cannot otherwise be approv'd to our own minds, nor consequently have any true self-enjoyment; which plainly shews that the governing design of the human frame was one, namely the good of the whole; and therefore that the one Father of all men is the Author of it; tho' he has made us in an imperfect state, and not without the possibility of rebelling against the law of our nature.

From this may be infer'd the whole duty of man, summ'd up by our Saviour in these two branches, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* The obligation of the latter, the love of our neighbour, or every one of mankind, arises from the law of our creation. Since we are children of the same family, the offspring of one father, and plac'd under a constitution which is wisely and graciously intended for the greatest and most extensive good of the whole kind, what can be more natural and reasonable, than that we should do all the good offices in our power to each other? This is to answer the end of our being, and to work together with God. The inanimate creatures serve the purposes for which they were made, without any thought; and the brutal species act according to their instincts, without discerning the design of them. But since God has endued us with a capacity of understanding the end of his own works, and of our own powers and affections, is it not evident that we ought

to fulfil that end, in a nobler manner, not by an unintelligent necessity, but voluntarily? It is true, we have a principle of self-love planted in us, which, far from thwarting the design of the social affections, is perfectly consistent with it, and ministers to it; for the care of every individual, is for the good of the whole species. But to confine our affections and our cares to ourselves, neglecting the offices which arise from the relation we have to men, as our brethren, is to trespass against the establish'd order of the world, and to violate the respect which we owe to the one God and Father of all, who is the Author of it.

2dly, The principal duty of mankind is to love the Lord their God and to serve him. This follows directly from the acknowledgment of his unity. And accordingly *Moses* having in the text, called upon *Israel* to hearken to this important truth that the Lord our God is one Lord, immediately adds in the following verse, *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* The same duty is otherwise express'd at the 13th verse, refer'd to and thus quoted by our Saviour *, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.* The constitution of our minds leads us directly to that honour and service God requires, so that we need not say *who shall ascend to heaven for us, or descend to the deep*, to bring us instruction concerning our duty to him: The knowledge of it is near us, even in our hearts. If we look attentively into ourselves, we shall find that intelligence necessarily attracts our esteem, and that gratitude to a benefactor is the natural growth of our minds: an inward veneration arises for wisdom display'd in a variety of works wherein one noble end is regularly pursued; and good communicated with design, produces warm affections in every heart which deliberately attends to it, and is not under a strong unnatural prepossession. Now since our reason convinces

* Mat. iv. 10.

us that all the wisdom of the universe centers in one mind; that all the effects of intelligence which we behold in the universal system of nature, are to be attributed to one Cause; that all the scattered rays of intellectual light which we discern in limited, dependent understandings, are but emanations from one eternal fountain of wisdom, and all the good we possess, or see, flows from one never-failing, bountiful Spring; then in all reason, according to the direction of our intelligent nature, our highest esteem and most intense affection should be plac'd on that eternal Mind, that glorious, perfectly wise and benevolent Cause of all things. He is intitled to a peculiar honour from us, such as no other being can claim; we ought to have the greatest respect for him in our hearts, and carry it always with the humblest reverence towards him in our whole behaviour. So reasonable is that rule of revealed religion, and which is one principal design of it, that men laying aside all superstition and idolatry, should worship and serve the true God, the supreme Being alone, *and have no other Gods before him*; still remembering that *he is a Spirit, and they that worship him acceptably, must worship him in spirit and truth*, not with outward forms of devotion, which when separated from good dispositions of mind and the obedience of our lives, cannot please him, but with the imitation of his holiness and goodness, and obeying his precepts of eternal and immutable righteousness, according to that excellent declaration of the Apostle St. John, * *This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.*

* 1 John v. 3.

DISCOURSE V.

The true Notion of Divine Omniscience,
of its Nature, Manner and Extent.

[ABERNETHY.]

Pfal. cxlvii. 5.

His understanding is infinite.

I Have observed, on another occasion, that the main controversy between *Atheists* and believers in God, is concerning his intelligence. None of the infidels, whether ancient or modern, have in express terms denied the being of God; but by that word they mean, not a particular designing and perfect Agent, the Maker of all things, (which is the true notion of the Deity,) but either blind unintelligent necessity, to which they attribute the existence of the world and every thing it contains, as the cause of all, or universal substances, comprehending the whole universe and all beings in it. As therefore in opposition to these absurd notions, we have full convincing proof of the existence of one Supreme Being absolutely perfect, the Maker and governor of the world; by the same clear evidence we know, that intelligence is a primary and essential attribute of his nature. And as this is what all his works teach us, the inanimate, the sensitive and the rational parts of the creation, join in proclaiming the understanding
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of their Maker; so without acknowledging it, we can have no right conceptions of him at all. The idea of a being without knowledge, even supposed eternal, immense and all-powerful, as *that* signifies not a voluntary activity, but a necessary cause, is really an idea of nothing at all to the purposes of religion, of nothing which can raise any admiration, honour and esteem, and is indeed of no importance to us. The worship of an ignorant Deity is the reproach of human nature; as no tolerable apology could be made for the *Heathens*, who serv'd idols *that bad eyes and saw not, and ears but heard not*; so none can be made for us, if we pay our religious homage to a being supposed void of understanding, whatever other perfections we ascribe to him, which are really no perfections at all in the deliberate esteem of the human mind.

I shall not now attempt to prove the intelligence of the Deity in general, for that has been already done by the arguments which prove his being: nor do I pretend to give a compleat idea of the Divine knowledge, which it is not to be imagin'd we can comprehend, for that were to suppose that our understandings are like his, infinite: But my intention in this discourse is, to make such observations concerning the nature, the manner and extent of it, as may give us a just and magnificent, tho' imperfect idea of that adorable perfection, and tend to produce those pious dispositions, and that dutiful respect which it claims from us.

First, It is certain that the knowledge of God extends to the whole compass of existence. Since all things that have being are either God himself or his works, it is impossible that any thing should be unknown to him. He is the most excellent of all objects, and the most incomprehensible by us; but yet a reflection on what passes in our own minds will lead us to this conclusion, that his perfections which infinitely transcend our capacity, are in the nearest and most

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most immediate view of his own understanding: For all the conceptions, and all the actions of intelligent beings, with the principles from which they proceed, are accompanied with consciousness. Of all the subjects to which we apply our thoughts, our own faculties and the exercise of them are the most clearly discerned, and the best understood by us. We know every idea that is presented to our minds, every imagination, every desire and volition, every enjoyment; the self-conscious spirit of a man knows every thing in him; and so we must judge concerning all intelligent beings, even to the highest and most comprehensive understanding. Now if God thoroughly knows his own perfections, if he knows his eternity better than we do our temporary duration, and his immensity more perfectly than we do our limited condition of being; if he knows his own perfect comprehension of things, but as clearly as we do our sensations, and his Almighty power, as clearly as we discern the limited activity of our minds:—This is an extent of knowledge which seems to follow necessarily from the supposition of his intelligence, as evident as his being, but must appear to us very great, the object being of all others the most above our understanding, and past our finding out. Indeed God's knowledge of himself, of the proper exercise and unlimited perfection of his own powers, may be said in some sense to be the knowledge of all things; for the utmost bounds of possibility do not exceed Omnipotence, and the whole compass of truth is within the reach of infinite understanding. I have observ'd else-where, * that the Essences of all things must, before the formation of the universe, have been known to the eternal Mind, as every wise agent forms a design in his thoughts before he executes it. Can any thing be difficult to him who sees all things in the first Cause, the whole frame of nature and all its parts, with the intire series of events from the

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foundation of the world, in his own counsels; who sees them, I say, with as great clearness, and with as great certainty, as we do the perceptions and determinations of our minds?

But it is directly and immediately evident that the whole of created existence is perfectly known to God, because it is all the work of his hands, and upheld by the word of his power. Every voluntary agent must be supposed to understand his own productions; the skill of the meanest artificer reaches to the limits of his own art; tho' he may be unacquainted with the nature of the materials he works upon, he knows the labour he bestows on them, and the compositions, figures and other sensible effects which depend upon his own operation. Since therefore God is the voluntary Maker of all things, disposing the whole frame of nature as it pleas'd him, and continually governing it by his own immediate agency, nothing can be hid from him. If in all that variety of being, and all the appearances which are in the universe, from the greatest to the least, from the utmost circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, there is nothing which his hand has not form'd, and his providence does not direct, every thing must be thoroughly known, for wherever his power works, there his understanding discerns.

This consideration leads us to form an idea of the Divine knowledge as different from, and infinitely more perfect than ours, even with respect to those objects which are, in some measure, known to us. It is from a reflection on our own understandings we take our rise to the apprehending of that perfection in the Deity; but we ought not to imagine that things appear to him in the same manner they do to us. Nothing is more evident than that different perceptive powers have different views of the same object. Our reason in many cases corrects the report of our senses, and sees things in quite another light; much more is it to be thought that an infinitely perfect

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mind *sees not as man sees*, that things are known to him, not in a remote and distant way, by their external appearances and effects, as they are to us, but that his understanding penetrates into their inmost natures, and discerns clearly all their properties and powers. The little knowledge we have, was given us for particular purposes, not for a thorough comprehension of things; nor are they, any of them, put absolutely into our power, to govern and to use them every way, and for all the ends they are capable of serving, which would require a thorough understanding of their nature, attributes, and powers of every kind. We discern by our senses some qualities of material objects; rather they are the occasion of exciting certain ideas in us, whereby the bountiful author of nature has made them useful to the preservation, the conveniency, and the enjoyment of life. Our reason goes a little farther, discovering by observation, and by attending to the connexions and dependencies of things, other properties and relations, which may be applied to useful purposes in life, and afford various entertainment to the mind; still however there remains a great deal unknown to us, indeed the human understanding seems to be unequal to the comprehension of any thing. But the Maker and absolute Governor of all things, knows them perfectly, not by external appearances and effects ascending to the discovery of causes, as we do; but as he form'd the plan of the whole universe and the intire extent of being, in his own counsels, he sees effects in their causes, having by the free determination of his own will, given them whatever measure of power and perfection they possess. None of those essences can be hid from him, of which he had the perfect idea in his own mind before the Being actually existed: He can be ignorant of no property, virtue, or efficiency, (nor any thing that can be effected by it) which is derived wholly from himself; all the powers of nature, with the remotest consequences

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which depend upon them, must be at once in his view; and seeing he has all the creatures absolutely under his dominion, disposing of them at his pleasure, and actually does govern them by the immediate exercise of his power, he must have, not a partial knowledge like ours, of some particular uses they serve, but a thorough understanding of their utmost capacity.

Besides the wide difference which there is between the knowledge of God and that of finite beings, particularly mankind, in the extent of them, both with respect to the number of objects, and the discernment of their nature, properties, relations and uses; the one is narrow and confined to a few things, the other reaches to the whole circle of being; the one is superficial and inadequate, the other sees it object on all sides; discerns not some only, but all its relations, and not the exterior appearances and effects only, but its very essence and the secret springs of all its operations. Besides this, I say, there are other important differences, relating to the manner of knowledge; and to the apprehending of those differences we are also led, by observing the exercise and progress of our own understandings in various instances. There are some of our perceptions perfect in their kind from the very beginning: Our original simple ideas are subject to no alterations, capable of no improvement; the ideas of colours and other sensible qualities remain invariably the same; the consciousness we have of our own existence, our powers, perceptions and operations, is always clear and determinate; not only so, our knowledge of some truths is distinct and compleat, from the first moment of their being intelligibly propos'd, without any difficulty or labour in reasoning, and this knowledge is called intuitive. But there are other things in the knowledge of which we make proficiency, and proceed to the discernment of them by degrees. We can variously compound and associate our ideas; we

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observe their connexions and differences, their agreement and disagreement; and from one truth clearly perceiv'd, we go on to the discovery of another, which, according to the measure of evidence that appears in the connexion, is judg'd certain or probable. Such is the narrowness of the human mind as not to be able to perceive actually at once, all things which it has known; and this defect is in some measure supplied by memory, or the revival of ideas which were in it before. This progress of our understandings, arising from their limited capacity, evidently shews their imperfection, and must be attended with difficulty, confusion, and uncertainty in some part of our knowledge, which probably in some degree, all finite beings are subject to. But the supreme Mind is *perfect in knowledge*; all things are clearly perceiv'd by it, and all their connexions, differences and relations, without any confusion, obscurity or uncertainty. The variety and multiplicity of the objects cause no perplexity in his understanding, which is large enough to contain them all, without being embarrass'd or forgetting any thing. *There is no creature that is not manifest in the sight of God, but all things are naked unto his eyes and opened*, even to their inmost essences; and without the labour of investigating truth by reasoning, he discerns, by a simple and direct intuition, the whole series of causes and effects. Thus we ought to conceive of the Divine knowledge, as altogether free from the imperfections and infirmities which cleave to ours; and tho' the intellectual powers which God has given to some creatures, as they are a convincing proof of his own intelligence, and may be justly call'd the most excellent of his works, making honourable distinctions among the creatures, in the degree wherein they are possess'd, (for knowledge is necessarily esteem'd by every rational being;) yet are they all, even the highest of them, but faint images of that original perfect understanding, from whence they are derived, which therefore justly challenges

our highest admiration and esteem. Human acquirements in knowledge, short and defective as they are, procure respect; the men, who by diligent study, have improv'd their minds in useful learning, are on that account in reputation. We think of the angels with greater veneration, as a far higher order of beings, and their superior excellence consists in, at least one principal branch of it is, a more extensive knowledge. But even this is only a faint ray derived from the *Father of lights*, the pure eternal Fountain, who communicates light in various measures to the intellectual world, whereby it is animated, directed and fitted to proclaim his praise, yet suffers no diminution of his infinite understanding, as the sun illuminates, beautifies and refreshes all things within its system, without any abatement of its splendor. To that purest intelligence, that most perfect Wisdom, which has *taught us more than the beasts of the field*, and to whose *inspiration* we owe our *understanding*, which is the very capacity of all our enjoyments; to that blessed, underived Spring of knowledge, let our minds always give the highest honour and pay the most dutiful respect, adore him who *commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and hath put wisdom into the heart*, the image of his own perfection.

The 2^d observation concerning the Divine knowledge is, that it reaches to all the actions of free moral agents. This is a point of the greatest importance to us, and should affect our minds in the most sensible manner, because we *have to do with God*, as our Law-giver and our Judge. He has, by various methods, made their duty known to mankind; some notices of his will are given to all men, *the work of his law is written in their hearts*, and he has *shewed them that which is good*, by the light of nature: Some of them he has favour'd with a clear and express revelation, and will call them to account for their obedience to the law they were under. Now for this important part of his administration, as the supreme Ruler of

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the world, he is perfectly qualified by his exact knowledge of men, of all their ways, and all their works, even to the most secret of them. His knowledge of other things may excite our admiration; but this more immediately concerns us, and calls for our attention, because the greatest consequences depend upon it: Our happiness in the enjoyment of his favour, if he sees that *our works are perfect*, and that we have *walked before him in integrity and with upright hearts*, or the lasting miserable effects of his disapprobation, if he knows that we have been workers of iniquity.

As no consideration can be more awful than that of the Omniscience of God, extending to all our works, and every circumstance which may heighten their moral goodness or malignity; so it is particularly to be remember'd, that his eye penetrates into the secret springs of action, *he searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men*. And this is absolutely necessary in order to a perfect judgment of our moral behaviour. For virtue and vice, religion and irreligion do not consist merely, or principally, in outward acts, but in the intentions and dispositions of the mind, of which every man's conscience is a witness, for it approves or reproaches him, not according to the external appearance of his works, but according to the inward affections and purposes of his heart. Human judicature cannot proceed so far; works, as they appear in the view of men, and the sensible effects of them, come only under its cognisance. Indeed intention is suppos'd, without which an action cannot be said to be rational, or properly human; but it is not known with certainty, and if it were, it is but a very imperfect judgment which could be made by it, concerning the morality of works. For all that civil judicature supposes, is, that a man is the voluntary cause of his own actions, or that he designs to do what he does; it does not pretend to judge of his remoter views, of the prevalent affections of the heart, and the motives which influenc'd it, and

of the regard had to the approbation of God and of conscience ; all which are points of the greatest moment, in order to a precise determination of right and wrong in the moral sense. But God sees, not as man sees ; he looks not to the outward appearance, but the heart, discerning all its most secret imaginations and contrivances. And indeed without this, he could not be the righteous Judge of the world, rendering to all men finally according to their works.

The direct proof of this point is the same that has been already insisted on, for the perfection and universal extent of God's knowledge in general ; namely, his being the intelligent Cause and Disposer of all things, which shews that the active powers of the rational creatures are as well known to him, with their utmost exertions, as the passive powers of matter and all its modifications. These kinds of beings are essentially different, and so are their powers ; but they are equally the work of God's hands, and therefore must be equally known to him. The free agency of some, wholly derived from, and depending on himself, does not place them out of his view ; and since he is the designing Author of that faculty, and form'd it for certain ends, he must understand all its exercises, whereby it is fitted to answer those ends. And as the natural government of the Deity, from which the freest created agents are not exempted, proves his perfect knowledge of all his creatures, and all their works, so of his moral government over mankind, which requires a perfect knowledge of their moral actions, we have a natural intimation in our own presaging thoughts. Those to whom God has not given any positive revealed law, yet have a rule of life written in their hearts, to which *their consciences bear witness* ; and their own *accusing and excusing thoughts*, as they are attended with the greatest pleasure and pain which the mind is capable of, and which are the present sanction of the law of nature ; so they are premonitions of farther rewards and punishments,

nishments, to be distributed by the supreme Judge. But to this purpose they derive all their force from a secret impression, which seems to be indelibly engraven on every human heart, that God is the inspector of all our actions, and all our thoughts. With a view to a trial by men, we should have no farther solicitude than about the evidence of overt acts, because that is the rule according to which they must proceed; but since the testimony of conscience is the measure of our expectations from God, this necessarily supposes a persuasion that he is *greater than our hearts, and knows all things*. The argument will be greatly strengthened by the consideration of God's moral perfections, his rectitude, his goodness and justice, which cannot be fully exercised towards rational beings, without an infallible and compleat knowledge of their works. At present I only suppose his moral government, which cannot reasonably be doubted, since it is evident he has given us a moral nature, and a clear intimation that not only it is fit he should, but that he actually will call us to an account. Accordingly, it has been still the common belief of all men, who had any just sentiments concerning the Deity, that he is perfectly acquainted with the conduct of all moral agents, and will at some time or other, render them recompences according to their works.

If the foundation upon which we believe this particular branch of the Divine Omniscience be just, namely the evidences of a moral constitution and government of reasonable creatures, and the natural undeceiving impressions on the minds of men, of their being accountable for all their actions to God as their Judge, the consequence must be allow'd, that his knowledge of our hearts, and of all that enters into the morality of our works, is very perfect. For the character of a moral governor requires, not only that the condition of men should be determin'd according to the moral quality of their tempers and actions in general,

general, *that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked*, but also that the sentences pass'd upon them should bear a proportion to the measure of their goodness and sinfulness in a state of trial, which shews how exact the knowledge of their Judge must be.

Altho' all men come under the denomination of good and bad, and accordingly the state to which they shall be adjudged, is call'd a state of happiness or misery in general; yet both these admit of a great variety. As good men are not all alike good, and vicious men are not all alike vicious, so neither will their enjoyments and sufferings by the judgment of God be equal. † *They who have sown bountifully shall reap bountifully, and they who have sown sparingly, shall also sparingly reap*: That is, men shall enjoy felicity in exact proportion to the degree of their virtuous affections and virtuous labour. On the other hand, *some evil servants shall be beaten with few, and some with many stripes*; their punishment shall be inflicted in proportion to the obligations they have violated, which depend on their various circumstances, capacities, and opportunities of doing good. Now to adjust all this exactly and appoint to every man such a degree of happiness or of punishment, as is strictly proportionable to the measure of good or evil in his dispositions and his works, which a perfect moral government requires;—To do this, I say, none but an infinite understanding is sufficient, a clear and certain knowledge of the hearts of men, of the affections which are prevalent in them, of their motives of action, and of all the circumstances which concur to the perfection of their good works, or which either aggravate or extenuate their evil ones.

This extent of the Divine knowledge must appear to us wonderful. We find ourselves secure within the inclosure of our own breasts, from the inspection of every human eye; and we are sensible that none of

† 2 Cor. ix. 6.

us can discern the thoughts and designs of other men, farther than as they discover themselves by outward signs. But how shall we form an idea of an understanding which reaches to the most hidden recesses of all mens minds, and infallibly discerns the secret thoughts and intents of their hearts? Yet this evidently appears to be the prerogative of the supreme Being, who without it could not be the proper Judge of moral actions, as we are convinc'd he is, and cannot remove the impression of it out of our minds. And indeed the consideration of his Omnipresence, naturally leads us to acknowledge it: For as our minds perceive and operate in all parts of the little systems which they animate, so the most perfect Mind being every where, not in a partial derived manner, but in the fulness of its active intelligence, must discern every thing. Thus the *Psalmist* celebrates the glory of the Divine Omniscience in this amazing instance of it, † *O Lord thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?* “No change of place can
“hide me from thy All-seeing eye, for in all parts
“of the universe, I should be alike under thy inspection, and surrounded with thy powerful presence.”
Thou hast possessed my reins, thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. “As all the powers of my nature
“were derived from thee; as to thy forming hand
“they owe the beginning of their existence, and the
“various steps of their progress to perfection, and
“are still upheld by thy mighty providence; so they
“are continually in thy view, and every exertion of
“them is perfectly known to thee.” Since in God we live and move and have our being; since all our animal and rational powers necessarily depend upon him, and by his continued influence the frame of nature is preserved, no vital act, not even the least or

† Psal. cxxxix.

most secret movement in our minds, or our bodies, can be hid from his eye.

Before we proceed any further in our inquiry concerning the Omniscience of God, it may not be amiss to make some practical reflections on what has been already observ'd. There is no consideration more affecting to serious attentive minds, or which more directly tends to produce sincerity in our whole behaviour, than this of God's knowing our hearts. There is naturally a disposition in the minds of men to approve themselves to those intelligent beings who are witnesses of their conduct. Thus a desire of pleasing one another has a great share in forming our outward deportment, so far as it is open to human observation. But as the Divine approbation is infinitely more important, so the desire of obtaining it has a vastly more extensive influence, reaching not only to the external behaviour, but to the inward dispositions and the intents of the heart. How ridiculous does hypocrisy appear to a man who considers that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do? That no outward solemnities, no forms of devotion, or appearances of zeal, can impose on his perfect understanding? That he sees through the most subtle disguises and plausible pretences which an insincere heart can put on, and that they are as odious to him as open bare-fac'd wickedness?

Let us therefore always remember the excellent instructions of our Saviour † concerning acts of devotion and charity, which may also be applied to other duties, namely, that if we would hope for acceptance with God in our prayers and our alms, it is absolutely necessary to avoid outward pomp and ostentation. A prevailing desire of human applause, or, as he expresses it, making it our chief end *to be seen of men*, will undoubtedly destroy the sincerity of religious works, so called, and cut off our claim to the Divine

† Matt. vi.

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approbation. But if we perform our obedience only as unto our heavenly Father, with an affectionate sense upon our minds of his All-seeing eye observing us in secret, and with an upright intention to please him, he will accept of our service and *reward us openly*. Thus religion seated in the mind, and expressing itself by an uniform course of good actions, appears to be most reasonable and worthy of men, for it pursues the important design of obtaining God's favour, by the properest means. But on the other hand, if it be certain that God knows the secrets of all hearts, and will judge them, hypocrisy is extreme folly, as well as wickedness. For what good purpose can an insincere profession of piety serve, since we cannot hope to deceive him; or what rational account will a man be able to give of it to his own mind? Unless we will suppose the hypocrite persuaded that *God does not know*, and that *there is in the most high no knowledge* of man's actions, which probably is the case of very few, the worship which he performs with the greatest solemnity, and appearance of devotion, must appear to his reflecting thoughts, the most trifling and insignificant part of his conduct. It seems yet more absurd than the loud cries and extravagant rites of the priests of *Baal*, in that ridiculous light wherein the prophet *Elijah* elegantly sets them †; for it is not less unreasonable to awake a sleeping God by clamour, or call him off from other business which he is supposed to be attending, than to address services to one whom we believe to be awake and attentive, yet without any design to obtain his approbation?

And not only should this consideration of the Divine Omniscience engage men to sincerity in their worship, but to universal purity of heart, and integrity in their whole conversation. For as all the parts of our moral conduct are equally under the direction of his law, which requires us to do justly and to love

† 1 Kings xix. 27.

mercy as well as to walk humbly with God; and every work shall be brought into judgment before him, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; so his eye is continually upon us in all the affairs of life, and in every other deliberation and design, as well as our immediate addressees to himself. In vain *the * eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me, and disguiseth his face; and the murderer riseth with the light to kill the poor and needy, lurking as a thief in the night,* till he find an opportunity to execute his villainous purposes. For tho' such wicked men may be able to hide their designs from the view of the world, and thereby escape with impunity in it, yet God is witness to their most secret devices, even to the mischief which they have meditated in their hearts, altho' their hands have never executed it, and he will discover it hereafter to their utter confusion.

2dly, Since it is God's prerogative to know the hearts of men and judge them, we should not presume to invade it by rash censures. Some works of men both good and bad are manifest, so that we cannot avoid passing a judgment upon them, tho' still it is an imperfect one, for we cannot enter into the secret springs and motives of action; but other works are altogether hid from our knowledge, and concerning them we ought not to † *judge before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of God,* the praise which is justly due to his works. It is therefore with great reason that the apostles insist so much on this necessary caution to *Christians*, that they do not judge one another; which is not only becoming the deference they owe to the superior knowledge of their common master, and their professed expectation of appearing before his tribunal, but is the only foundation upon which charity and peace

* Job xxiv. 15. † 1 Cor. iv. 5.

can subsist among them. It is the violation of this rule, and *Christians* adventuring to pronounce judgment upon their brethren, even upon the secrets of their hearts, censuring and casting them out of their fellowship as insincere in their religious profession, because of different sentiments and practices in matters confessedly not essential;—'tis this, I say, which has brought so great reproach on *Christianity*, and occasion'd such fierce and scandalous contentions among the followers of *Jesus Christ*. On the other hand, we ought not to be immoderately affected with the unjust censures which frail mortals may ignorantly pass upon us. Every man, 'tis true, desires to stand fair in the esteem of the world, and good men value reputation, even with the weak, as that whereby they are render'd the more capable of being useful to them; but still there is a sufficient consolation to the sincere against unjust reproaches, in the testimony of their own consciences, and the impartial unerring judgment of him who searches the heart. If the praise of wise and virtuous men be a support against the undeserved calumnies of the ignorant and the wicked, much more may he enjoy an undisturb'd tranquility in his own breast, who having the approbation of his own mind, can securely appeal to an infallible witness, and leave his actions to be tried by the righteous Judge of the world, for to him *it is a very small thing to be judged of men's judgment, seeing he that judgeth justly is the Lord* *. The last branch of the Divine perfect knowledge, to us incomprehensible, which shall be the subject of the

3^d Observation, is prescience or foreknowledge of future events. That things to come, as well as the past and present, are known to the first intelligent Cause, is evident; for their being depends on his will, and all their powers are derived from him. He must therefore foresee the utmost which those powers can produce, and cannot be ignorant of what he intends

* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

himself to do. Every free agent is conscious of his own intentions, which, if there be not a defect of power, may infallibly ascertain the event; but the *everlasting God fainteth not, nor is weary*; he is as able to accomplish his designs at the remotest distance of time, as when they were first form'd, and therefore *known to the Lord are all his works from the beginning*. As to the effects of necessary causes, we can easily conceive that he foresees them, for they are, properly speaking, his own works. As he is the first mover in the material world, who by his wisdom originally dispos'd its various parts, and by his active power gave them all their force, he foreknows all the revolutions which can ever happen in it, and all the productions which can arise from it, for he is really the cause of them, and they are to be attributed to his continued operation. But that the free moral actions of intelligent beings, of which themselves are the sole compleat causes, depending wholly on the determination of their wills, and intirely imputed to them as their own; that these should be foreseen by any understanding, must appear to us very wonderful, because it is so far above the reach of human knowledge, and because there appears in it to us, no particular ground of certainty, or manner of attaining it, consistent with the freedom of the agents, whose future actions are suppos'd to be known. But yet that it really is so, that not only God knows the present thoughts and intents of all men's hearts, but what they will do and incline to do, in all circumstances wherein they ever shall be, has been believed by the generality of mankind, who have thought seriously on this subject, to be included in the Divine Omniscience. It seems to be unworthy of his infinite perfection to place such a multitude of things, some of them very important, and on which great consequences depend, out of the reach of his foresight. And as from the Omnipresence of God, and the absolute dependence of all rational creatures upon him,

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so that their powers of liberty and choice, as well as others, are derived from him, and supported wholly by his providence, we justly infer that those powers cannot exert themselves in any manner without his present knowledge, which is as incomprehensible to us as Prescience itself; it seems reasonable to conclude, that since these foundations of his knowledge are immutable, and alike clearly understood by him from eternity, being really nothing else but his own perfections and operations, the object must be equally in his view at all times, and that he must discern at once all the creatures, and the intire series of their actions, during the whole of their existence. Nay, the argument taken from God's being the intelligent Cause and supreme Ruler of all things, to prove that he knows the whole of actual existence, and whatever is done within its compass, in which all the operations of rational beings are included; this argument concludes as strongly for the same extent of his absolute eternal Prescience. For if the intire frame of nature now actually in being, and the intire scheme of providence, which he is now carrying on, comprehending the whole series of events; if these be the works of design, they must have been known before they began to be; and it is absurd, that powers wholly derived from, and absolutely depending on a wise Author, for ends which he intended, should not be foreseen by him, with all their exercises and all their possible productions. I shall not insist on it as a proof of this doctrine, that there have been prophecies fulfill'd of future events, which depended on the choice of free agents; not only believed by the weak and superstitious vulgar, but by men of the best understanding, upon clear historical evidence; such as the famous prediction of *Isaiah* concerning the great revolution in the *Eastern* monarchy, which was translated from *Babylon* to *Persia*, and particularly concerning *Cyrus*, whom the prophet expressly names long before he was born, describing his memorable

acts, and the favour granted by him to the Jews; nor the yet more illustrious example of our Saviour's death, foretold as fix'd in the *determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, tho' by wicked hands he was crucified and slain. Altho' no reason can be assign'd why, if the Divine Prescience extends to these cases, wherein men have acted their part as freely as in any other, the same Prescience may not be supposed equally to extend to all parallel cases, that is, to all the voluntary actions of men, and all the events which are accomplish'd by them. But, not to insist at present on arguments taken from revelation, however convincing they may appear to be, it would seem that if we only acknowledge the universal dominion of the supreme Being over the world, and his moral government over his rational creatures, the freest actions of men, and all other moral agents, are foreseen by him, otherwise there must be an uncertainty in the measures of his own administration. As the distribution of rewards and punishments is a very eminent part of his government, in which the honour of his Majesty, and his moral perfections, is nearly concern'd, and which is attended with the most remarkable changes in the state of the world, it must be unforeknown to himself in particular, with all the consequences of it, if the behaviour of rational creatures, to which it bears an exact proportion, is unforeknown. But this is a supposition which we can hardly think consistent with the glory of his absolute supremacy, the perfection of his wisdom, and the immutability of his counsels.

But the great difficulty, which I hinted before, is concerning the consistency of this infallible Divine Prescience, with the liberty of human actions. If God knows all future events certainly, and it is impossible any thing, particularly any action, should not come to pass which he foresees, and in the manner in which he foresees it, how then are these actions free? The answer is, that foreknowledge has no influence at all upon the nature of things, to make the least alteration

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teration in them. The events which are necessary are foreknown as necessary, and those which are contingent and voluntary, are foreknown no otherwise than as contingent and voluntary. As our knowledge of things present, be it ever so certain, does not affect their condition or manner of being; the mechanical motions of bodies are alike necessary, and the moral actions of men are alike free, whether we know them or not; and our foreknowledge of these different sorts of events, supposing we had it, could affect them no more than our knowledge of them when present; so neither has the simple Divine Prescience any kind of causality in the production, or does at all affect the nature and kind of events which are the objects of it. The foresight men have of their future actions in certain circumstances, does not in the least degree lessen their liberty, nor does God's foreknowledge of his own actions make him the less free; no more is there any reason to imagine that his Prescience of what other agents will do, impairs their freedom. We are conscious to ourselves of all the liberty in action, which we can think essentially requisite to the purposes of morality; we know that we are under no constraint in doing good or evil, but that our choice and refusal of the one or the other, proceeds from our own affections and the inward determination of our own minds, and this is the foundation of the inward self-condemnations and self-approbations of which we feel; and as the knowledge which God has of our actions, whether present or future, is what we are not conscious of, nor find any influence of it upon our self-determining and active powers; so it does not really change their nature or quality, making them more or less free.

As to the manner of God's foreknowing certainly contingent future events, that is, which have no necessary cause, nor are to be accomplish'd by his own power, and the determination of his will, but produc'd by other free agents; this seems to be incom-

prehensible by the human understanding. That any mind should foresee with certainty a distant event, which does not necessarily proceed from the nature of things, nor is fix'd by the purpose of a voluntary agent, is wonderful to us and far surpasses our conception. For as our knowledge of futurity can only rest on one or other of these foundations, we can form no distinct notion of any fore-knowledge without them. It is probably their apprehending the Divine Prescience after the same manner, and limiting it to the same grounds, which has occasion'd so much perplexity in the minds of men, and involv'd their speculations upon this subject in so much confusion. Some imagining that contingent events could not otherwise be so ascertain'd, as to be infallibly known, have suppos'd peremptory eternal decrees concerning all of them, even the freest actions of men; and not only so, but a previous Divine influence on the active powers of rational creatures, exciting them to action: But others judging this to be utterly inconsistent with human liberty, and, with respect to evil actions, inconsistent with the purity and goodness of the Divine nature, yet still adhering to the same limited foundation of foreknowledge, have denied the doctrine of Prescience altogether, or doubted concerning it. I believe the best way for us to get rid of these difficulties, is wholly to neglect the hypotheses, which have been invented to account for the manner of the Divine Prescience, acknowledging that it is to us inexplicable, and yet concluding that this is no sufficient objection against a doctrine, otherwise well confirmed. The futurity of contingent events is real, tho' we cannot tell the cause of it, or upon what grounds it is to be known. A free action now done, was yesterday, or in any preceding point of duration, as truly future, as it has to day actually come to pass; therefore it is not impossible, (for our minds can discern no contradiction in it) that an infinite understanding should foreknow such events, tho' that knowledge is

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too high for us, or perhaps any finite mind, we cannot attain to it. And here we may safely rest, as we find our selves oblig'd to do in our inquiries concerning the other perfections of God, which are evidently prov'd to belong to his nature, and therefore believ'd, tho' to us incomprehensible. We acknowledge his Omnipresence, Eternity, Self-existence and Omnipotence; yet the nature of these attributes, and the manner of their being, particularly the exercise of the last mention'd, his power in creating things out of nothing, as much exceeds our comprehension as his foreknowledge of future contingencies. We cannot indeed believe contradictions, and to impose them upon us is to affront the rational nature; but it is no absurdity to believe the existence and the properties of a being, whom *we cannot by searching find out, nor understand to perfection.*

This particular branch of God's Omniscience, gives us a very high idea of him, as the proper object of our adoration. How wonderful, how much to be esteem'd for its perfection, is that understanding, which not only sees distinctly all the past and present actions and thoughts of all intelligent beings, but those which are yet future, and discerns, even at the greatest distance of duration, all the productions of free as well as necessary causes? What can be hid from him *who understandeth our very thoughts afar off?* Surely no darkness can cover any thing from his sight. How despicable are the idols of the nations *who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not,* and who know not, and *cannot declare things to come?* How infatuated are their worshippers? How unhappy as well as inexcusable are they, who acknowledge no other God than chance or necessity? For what satisfaction can an intelligent being have in a world, suppos'd to be under no intelligent direction, but the course of things hurried on in it by giddy fortune, or irresistible fate, equally unknowing of futurity? On the contrary, the sincere servants of the true and living

118 *The true Notion of Divine Omniscience,*

God have this never-failing consolation, that however ignorant they are of what is to come, concerning which their minds are naturally anxious, he sees the end from the beginning, and no event can possibly surprize him; for even the freest purposes of men, and all other rational agents, were known in his eternal counsels, and the issues of them comprehended in the fore-appointed scheme of his administration.

2dly, As this knowledge is peculiar to God, necessarily arising from the infinite perfection of his nature, and no finite mind can attain to any part of it with certainty, otherwise than by communication from him, he has wisely hid it from men, that they may learn to trust his providence with absolute resignation. We are not to form our schemes in life, and take the measures of our conduct, by a discernment of particular future events, (for they are cover'd from our sight under impenetrable darkness,) but by general laws which God has given us, and by our observations on the ordinary course of things. No man can be sure of success, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, the best concerted projects are liable to a multitude of accidents which do not fall within the reach of our foresight. But this ought to give us contentment, and here we ought to rest with pleasure, that the wise and good God knows all things; and having done what was on our part reasonable, we may safely *commit our way and our work* to him, leaving the direction of events to his providence. Nor ought we to pry too curiously into futurity, which God has concealed from us. This is an error which weak and distrustful minds are apt to fall into. The *Gentiles* were not so inexcusable in it, *who knew not God*; but for *Christians* to apply themselves to such as practise the arts of necromancy and divination, for revealing secrets and foretelling things to come, is to expose themselves as a prey to impostors, and to dishonour the true God, who has favoured them with a clear manifestation of himself, by attributing

buting to dæmons and their pretended agents, that knowledge which peculiarly belongs to him. And,

Lastly, Let us take no thought for to-morrow, for our heavenly Father knows what we need; he knows what is best, and what the event of things will be. And let us not boast of to-morrow, nor be vainly puff'd up, with any expectations in this world, for God only knows, we know not, what a day, or any future time, may bring forth.

DISCOURSE VI.

The Wisdom of God manifested in the
Constitution and Government, both of
the natural and moral World.

[ABERNETHY.]

1 Tim. i. 17.

*Unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only
wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.
Amen.*

IT is evident beyond all rational contradiction, that the world was made, and is governed by design; and that the appearances of nature, and the series of events, which every one may observe, cannot be accounted for without supposing intelligence in the universal Cause. But there is a difference between understanding and wisdom, as between a power, or faculty, and the right use of it. Understanding is the fundamental capacity of wisdom, and wisdom is the proper exercise and improvement of understanding. Our own experience, and our observations upon the conduct of mankind, lead us to distinguish between acting with design and acting wisely; the *former* is the character of all rational agents, but, alas! we have too good reason to know that the *latter* does not always accompany it: And
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wisdom admits of various degrees; the inequality arising from several causes; either an unequal measure of knowledge, for according to our discernment of the reason of things, their relations, connexions and dependencies, so must our conduct be wise or unwise; or from the motives which influence the springs of action. We find in ourselves a variety of affections, which prompt us to act, preventing deliberate attention. Men do not always govern themselves according to the dictates of cool reason, and pursue the measures which themselves know, or believe to be the best, but are often bias'd by prejudices, and misled by their particular propensities, to do what their own minds do not approve. Therefore knowledge and wisdom are different qualities, and they must be consider'd as distinct attributes in the Deity; tho' in him, as may be afterwards observ'd, the one is justly infer'd from the other; and the same arguments which prove his intelligence in general, prove him also to be wise.

Wisdom in any agent is estimated by his approbation of such ends, as in the judgment of the person forming the estimation, are most suitable to his nature, and an invariable pursuit of those ends by the best and most effectual methods. It is first of all, absolutely necessary that a right design be propos'd, else no scheme of action can possibly obtain our esteem as wise, or intitle the agent to that character. If we see a man ever so ingenious about trifles, and contriving methods which have the greatest aptitude to accomplish low ends, and unworthy of his rational nature, this can never raise any veneration for him in our hearts, nay, we shall pronounce all his contrivances foolish. Now concerning ends, 'tis plain that to us they are determin'd by our affections; and the measure of them, I mean the rule whereby we judge whether they be good or bad, right or wrong, is no other than our own approbation. Subordinate ends are only considered as means, and derive their value from the higher purposes which they serve; and ultimate

imate ends to the human mind are either private happiness, or the good of others, to the pursuit of which we are determin'd by self-love and benevolence, the general governing springs of action in our nature; 'tis the actions only which ultimately terminate in those ends, or which have a tendency to promote them, that we pronounce wise. The man who takes the measures, and steddily adheres to them which have the strictest connexion, not with the gratification of a particular appetite or passion, but his own true, most extensive and compleat felicity, or with the greatest public good, is to be acknowledged a wise man; he who acts upon lower and inconsistent views, does not merit that character.

But the question is, how shall we judge concerning the ends of the Deity, so as with understanding to pronounce him wise? Can we pretend to know what is or is not becoming the dignity and perfection of his nature? Or, shall we make the instincts planted in our minds for the particular purposes of our being, a standard whereby to examine his actions, and pass a judgment upon them? I answer, that tho' indeed the Divine excellencies infinitely surpass our understanding, and we cannot take upon us to judge, as from a complete knowledge of them, what views they may require to be pursued; yet there are some things which we cannot possibly help thinking worthy of every intelligent nature. Our minds are so constituted that we necessarily approve and admire goodness; and the Being who appears in his counsels to have intended, and by his actions to promote the most extensive happiness of other beings which are capable of it, we must judge to have the first and essentially requisite qualification of a wise agent. Again, tho' we have not such a knowledge of the Divine perfections, and of the nature and reason of things, as to qualify us for judging, *à priori*, what is fittest for him to do; yet by observing the mutual relations and harmony of things which he has made, and the apti-

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rude of some, as means, to answer others as the ends of them, we may collect, what in fact he did intend, and thereby discern the wisdom of the whole constitution. It is impossible indeed for any finite understanding to penetrate into the depths of his designs, or take in the intire scheme of his administration. We know not what remote and very important purposes may be serv'd by his works, beyond all the views which fall under our observation; *for who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been his counsellor?* But even by such a partial observation as our limited capacity can reach to, we may be able to trace the marks of excellent understanding in some of the ways of God, and from thence reasonably conclude, that perfect wisdom governs the whole. For example, the Divine government over mankind, and the methods of providence towards them, may have a relation to the universe, and affect other orders of intelligent beings in a manner which we cannot comprehend; but considering it abstractly, and as intire in itself, without any such relation, which is our way of conceiving, it may appear to us wise, and worthy of the most excellent Being.

2dly, Wisdom consists in the choice and the use of proper means for accomplishing good ends. Supposing an agent to have very right intentions, which is so far praise-worthy, yet it shews a defect of understanding, if he fails in the execution, by choosing means which are not fit. And it is this which is principally meant by wisdom, so far as it denotes an intellectual ability. For to the ends which they pursue, moral agents are determin'd by their affections; but in the choice of means their understanding only can direct. Therefore imperfect minds which do not comprehend all the relations and connexions of things, and do not foresee all future events, must be deficient in wisdom, tho' without any fault in a moral sense; and the character of wise must be appropriated to God as it is in the text; *for he is only wise*, having a perfect

perfect knowledge of every thing which shall ever come to pass, and which any power will, or can possibly produce. It is elegantly said in the book of *Job*, *he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels be chargeth with folly* *: Their understandings, tho' vastly large, are not infinite; their great natural capacity is improv'd to a very high measure of knowledge, by their standing always in the presence of God, and receiving his instructions. Yet it is insufficient for the government of the world, and the direction of its affairs, which God hath reserv'd in his own hands; committing nothing to the contrivance of his ablest ministers, (they are only employ'd to execute his orders) because of their imperfection in wisdom.

In this sense, the perfect wisdom of God is necessarily infer'd from the other absolute perfections of his nature. If he be every where present, and wherever he is present there is activity which cannot be resisted, and intelligence which cannot be misled or impos'd upon:—if he is absolutely Omniscient, knowing not only all things which now are, with the greatest exactness, even the most secret thoughts of intelligent beings, but also all things which shall be produc'd, whether by necessary or free causes; it follows, that he can never possibly be mistaken in his measures, or come short of a right judgment upon the expediency of things, or the fitness of means for attaining the ends he proposes. Since his power is infinite and cannot be controul'd, nor his designs defeated by any opposition, and there is no imaginable cause which should induce him to alter his designs, † *but his counsel standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations*; since it is so, nothing can be wanting to the highest perfection of wisdom; no weakness, no error, no irresolution or unsteadiness can ever be charg'd on any of his measures. Such is the rashness and folly of poor short-sighted mortals, that they

* Job iv. 18.

† Psal. xxxiii. 11.

take upon them to censure the works of God as defective in wisdom, altho' we have not only the same evidence of this which is common to other of his attributes, that is, we know it by its fruits and effects; but supposing his other perfections to be prov'd, his knowledge, and his power, and his omnipresence, we are satisfied before hand by reasoning which is fully convincing, without considering his works of creation and providence, which abundantly display his wisdom; we are satisfied, I say, that he is, and necessarily must be infinitely wise.

Another general argument to prove the wisdom of God, is taken from the faint and imperfect images of it which are in some of the creatures, and which must be deriv'd from the *father of lights*, himself therefore possess'd of that perfection in the highest degree. As intelligence in the effect is a clear evidence of it in the Author, tho' of a superior kind, (for it could not possibly proceed from an unintelligent Cause;) so particularly, the highest improvement, and the best use of understanding can never exceed, nor indeed equal the original Fountain from which all knowledge flows; and therefore the wisdom of God is absolutely supreme. Since God only hath *put wisdom into the inward parts, and given understanding to the heart*, all the measures of wisdom which any created and finite beings can attain to, must needs be inferior to his. For, the effect can neither originally have, nor ever possibly arrive to the perfection of the voluntary complete cause. If it could, then of that equal, and therefore independent perfection, or degree of perfection, it would be a cause to itself, rather there would be no cause at all. Tho' 'tis true *this* is an improveable ability in imperfect minds, which grow in wisdom by attention, industrious inquiry, and careful observation, yet never independently on God, nor can their acquirements rise to an equality with the Divine understanding. For the very capacity of improvement is derived from him, the means are under the

the direction of his providence, and the success depends on his good pleasure. And the increase, as it is limited in its degrees, by the will of him who hath determin'd the measures of perfection to which every one of his creatures shall, or can attain, so it implies an imperfection from which the first Cause is absolutely free, whose wisdom, as all the other excellencies of his nature, is incapable of any addition or diminution.

But the most obvious proof of the wisdom of God, and to attentive minds it is fully convincing, is, by his works of creation and providence; his originally making all things in heaven and earth, and disposing them in the order in which they appear; his preserving them all and governing them, in the way which is most suitable to their several natures, and so as they may best answer the ends of their being. They are made so as to have a visible mutual relation to each other, with the most exquisite skill and contrivance, and plainly to discover that the whole is under the direction of one ruling Counsel. Inanimate things are upheld by the power of God, and directed in their motions, constantly and uniformly, to serve particular purposes. Sensitive beings have a suitable provision made for the support of their lives, and are govern'd by instincts which determine them to pursue the proper ends of their nature. And rational agents have laws given them for regulating their conduct, and they are furnished with proper motives of action, by the influence of which they are directed, freely, and with understanding, to pursue the proper ends of their being. Upon a general survey of these works of God, there appears an obvious congruity in the whole, and a designed subserviency of some to others. It is evident, that the motions of the heavenly bodies, and the constant uniform influence of them in the various productions upon our globe, are under such a direction as to answer the end of sustaining a multitude of living things in their regular successions; ani-

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mals are under an apparent oeconomy, whereby they are render'd useful to one another, and all of them subordinated to man. Now I say, even upon such a slight and general view, we have a clear discovery of infinite Divine wisdom. The greater variety there is in any system, which must all be within the comprehension of the mind that form'd it, provided there appears unity of design and regular contrivance, the larger still we must conclude the understanding to be. A narrow capacity reaches only to a few things, placing them in due order; if a great multitude be put under its care, it is embarrass'd and thrown into confusion. But how vast is the comprehension of that providence which takes under its guidance the whole heavens and the earth, with all things that are in them, which conducts the motions of the celestial orbs, yet without neglecting the meanest animal or vegetable on this earth; and so adjusts all the parts of the stupendous fabric, that whatever changes any of them may undergo, their correspondence to each other is uniformly maintain'd, and the harmony of the whole.

Especially the variety of kinds, yet more than the multitude of individuals, properly dispos'd, demonstrates the wisdom of the Creator and supreme Governor of the world. There is no diversity at all in the productions of necessary unintelligent causes; and, in proportion to their measure of understanding, the operations of free agents are confin'd to a few similar effects, or extend to a greater variety. It is thus that we estimate a human genius; the man who is skill'd in many different branches of learning, in history, in languages, in politics and philosophy, or who knows how to act a proper part in very different stations of life, is reputed wiser than he whose knowledge is confin'd to a few particulars. But how adorable is that wisdom which has display'd itself marvelously in the whole gradation of being; which shines conspicuously, not only adjusting with the utmost exactness, the

the mechanism of the material world, but has form'd intirely different and superior kinds, namely spirits, to whose nature and condition of being the methods of his providence are as well accommodated as to the other. The constitution and form of government under which intelligent creatures are plac'd, is, at least, as clear a manifestation of the Divine wisdom, as the frame and direction of the corporeal system. And, which is most worthy of our observation to the present purpose, these essentially different kinds are most conveniently dispos'd of, with relation to each other. Spirit and body are united in the human composition; and as the system is distinguish'd in its formation by the Creator's skill, it is as much distinguish'd by the administration of his providence. From man there is a descent, I mean as to the degrees of their perfection, in the works of God which we are best acquainted with. The next inferior rank are the brutal species, and among them a beautiful variety, some making a much more considerable figure than others in the animal kingdom; some more eminently useful, and even making nearer approaches to the human understanding. From them the perfection of the animal life lessens by various descending degrees, 'till it comes so near the vegetable world as scarcely to be distinguished. Of vegetables there are as various kinds, all of them ministering to sensitive beings as a superior order, and these latter are directed to the proper use of them by particular instincts: And inanimate things are constantly so govern'd as to serve the purpose of producing the several sorts of herbs, trees and fruits. This order is maintain'd amidst an infinite diversity; and as there is a scale of being appointed by the great designing Author, so there is a subordination of use, the lower still serving the higher, till we ascend to man, the chief of the works of God in our world. Who that attends to this obvious face of nature, and the daily administration of providence, can help acknowledging

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not only design, that is, the being of God, but perfectly wise counsel, discover'd in the admirable œconomy of all things, as far as his works come within our knowledge?

A more particular and accurate inquiry into all these things, would set the evidence of Divine wisdom still in a clearer and stronger light; shewing not only that the universe consider'd as one intire work, discovers wonderful counsel in the constitution of it, having all its parts for several uses regularly dispos'd and fitted to each other; but every particular being which can be consider'd as a separate intire system and compleat in itself, carries in its frame the clearest manifestations of its Author's perfect understanding. Not only *the Lord by wisdom stretched out the heavens, and established the earth by his discretion*, but in the constitution of every single terrestrial and celestial body, is manifested the exquisite skill of their designing intelligent Maker. As to the celestial, they are too far distant for our minute observation; and human science is principally conversant about their magnitude, distance and regular motions, in which the modern improvements of astronomical learning open a surprising scene, displaying the wisdom of God beyond what appears to the first views of an un-instructed spectator. In the composition of bodies whose properties are better known to us, as air, water, earth, stones, minerals, vegetables of every kind, animals, and especially the human body;—in all of these and each of them, the manifold wisdom of the Creator is discover'd. And here also it is worthy of our observation, that the progress of learning has most eminently tended to establish the foundations of religion; for the discoveries which have lately been made in natural history, philosophy and anatomy, have greatly illustrated and confirm'd this important article we are now considering. It is not convenient in this short discourse to descend to particulars, even which are commonly known. But this I may safely

Vol. I. K say,

say, that it shows an amazing infatuation in any man, who has not spent his life in the utmost obscurity, entirely unacquainted with that knowledge of nature which is the subject of common conversation in this age and these parts of the world, not to be convinc'd, that as the works of God are *manifold*, so in *wisdom* *he has made them all*, and particularly that the human body is *fearfully and wonderfully made*.

If we proceed farther to consider man in his better part, which *God made after his own image*, the workmanship will appear in a peculiar manner, worthy of the Author's perfect understanding. And first of all, let us observe our situation in the universe. We are nearly allied and closely united to the corporeal world, a part of matter fitly organiz'd to convey the notices of external things, and to be the mind's instrument of action, is a part of ourselves. Is not wisdom manifested in placing rational capacities thus conveniently for contemplation, and for the proper improvement of them in a rational happiness, which especially arises from adoring, and actively shewing the praises of the Almighty, All-wise and bountiful Creator? Since this earth is such a beautiful fabric, so curiously fram'd and adorn'd, and all God's works in it, even those which are unintelligent, praise him in a silent way, by giving to rational beings an occasion of observing and admiring his perfections manifested in them, can we help thinking it was worthy of the wise Author, nay, does it not appear to be the finishing excellence of such a work, to furnish it with understanding inhabitants, fitted with proper powers and affections for enjoying it, capable of discerning its various beauty, and applying it to the delightful purpose of celebrating his praise? This honourable province is therefore wisely assign'd to man, as he is qualify'd for it by the faculties of his nature, and holds the first rank in this lower visible part of the creation.

But if we consider the human constitution by itself, it will appear to be the finish'd production of a wise

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Author. To judge of this it is necessary to have in view the ends of our being, which obviously arise from the very frame of our nature. Man is a compound of body and spirit; by the former of which he has a necessary relation to the material world, which is the first appointed stage of his existence; his life consider'd as an animated system of matter, is nourish'd by the productions of the earth, and the necessities of his animal nature employ the cares of his mind. The other part, the spirit, is endued with nobler powers, and is capable of higher enjoyments, of the pleasures of virtue, of self-approbation, and the favour of God, which are wholly independent on the body. These ends, as different as the essences of soul and body, are united in our constitution, and may be jointly pursu'd without confusion. For the purposes both of the animal and rational life we are fitted with proper faculties, instincts and affections: We have senses whereby are communicated to us such ideas of external objects as are useful to the animal nature, and likewise the materials of entertaining knowledge to the mind: We have appetites directing and prompting us to the use of those things which are the means of preserving the present life, and of such happiness as it is capable of, without being left wholly to the conduct of calm reason, which would be too weak to answer the end sufficiently, and by attending such affairs would be too much diverted from more important employments. And particularly, in considering the animal part of the human life, it can hardly escape our observation, that provident nature has shewn her wise care for the species, by planting in the individuals instincts which powerfully determine them to pursue its general interests, tho' often accompanied with great labour, anxiety and pain. The superior part in our composition, the spirit, is made for nobler ends, and is qualified to pursue them by nobler faculties, affections and determinations: It has understanding, liberty, choice, an instinct of benevolence as well

as self-love, and conscience, whereby it judges of its own dispositions and actions according to a deeply engraven and invariable sense of good and evil, from the consciousness of which different moral qualities in itself, arises the most solid inward joy, or the most painful reflexion. These powers appear to our own minds to have a very great excellence in them, and to dignify us highly above other beings in the world about us; and the regular exercise of them leads to a great, perpetually increasing happiness, to the pursuit of which we are directed by attending to our own frame. The understanding is a faculty which points to its own proper use and improvement; not only directing the exercise of all our other powers, but affording itself an eminent pleasure, far superior to all sensual gratifications. Liberty, tho' in us unavoidably accompanied with a possibility of doing wrong, yet is absolutely necessary to our doing right in a moral sense, from which the highest satisfaction arises in the mind. It is virtue which raises our nature to the greatest perfection it can attain to; and what stronger inducement can there be to the practice of it, than, what is inseparable from our very constitution, the joy of self-approbation which naturally flows from it, and the self-reproach which necessarily follows the contrary? And as the human mind is naturally solicitous about futurity, another state of existence is the subject of its presaging thoughts, and its earnest desires extend even to immortality, which, together with the scanty measure of its attainments here, both in knowledge and enjoyment, far below what its faculties are capable of, and seem to be design'd for; is at least a probable argument that it is design'd to subsist hereafter. That same consciousness of integrity or moral goodness, which affords the truest present tranquility and satisfaction to the mind, gives it also confidence towards God as the righteous Judge of the world, rendering it secure in the expectation of all changes which he shall appoint.

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If we descend to a more particular consideration of the laws of nature, we shall find that they are every way worthy of a wise Law-giver, as having a certain connexion with the ends of his own constitution, and of our being. The virtue of sobriety, a very important part of the law written in our hearts, evidently tends to the preservation and the easy enjoyment of life, and to the more vigorous exercise of our superior powers and affections. The fear of God, as it is our wisdom, the injunction of it shews the wisdom of the natural laws; for it improves the mind, and yields it the most delightful entertainment; and it secures the practice of every other virtue: And charity is *the perfect bond* of human society; fit therefore to be prescribed by that gracious Governor whose care extends to all mankind, and who by thus providing for the common safety has wisely promoted, instead of diminishing the happiness of every individual; for the truest contentment of mind accompanies an universal, undissembled good-will. Thus all the works of God have the evidences of his wisdom clearly stamp'd upon them, whether we view them in the whole or in parts, and the more diligently we apply our selves to this inquiry, the more we shall be satisfied that the character of *only wise*, justly belongs to him.

Another illustration of this subject is taken from the manner of the Divine operations, which are so contriv'd that a vast multitude of effects depend on one or a few causes. This is always regarded as an excellency in any work, which still appears the more beautiful, manifesting the capacity of the Author, the more various its regular appearances are, and the greater simplicity there is in the manner of producing them. When every several effect has a particular separate cause, this gives no pleasure to the spectator, as not discovering contrivance. But that work is beheld with admiration and delight, as the result of deep counsel, which is complicated in its parts, and yet simple in its operation, where a great variety of effects

fects are seen to arise from one principle operating uniformly. That this is the true character of the works of God, we shall be satisfied by considering the natural and the moral world; in both which a vast diversity of appearances depend upon single causes. The best explication which has yet been given of the great phenomena in the mundane system, resolves them into attraction and gravitation; that is, a force impress'd on all bodies whereby they mutually attract, or tend towards each other, according to the quantity of matter they contain, and in proportion to their distances. It is this which accounts for the regular motion of the planets; so necessary to the beauty and order of the visible world; for the pressure of the air so useful to the preservation of the animal life; for the ascent of vapours from the earth and the waters, and their descent when collected and condensed, in refreshing rains; for the perpetual flux of rivers; for the ebbing and flowing of the sea; and for the stability of the earth, supporting innumerable living creatures, with all convenient furniture for their accommodation; and it is the foundation of all human mechanical arts, without which life would not be tolerable. But this simple cause, productive of so many important appearances in nature, must be attributed to God the first mover, as his work; for it is not to be explained without having recourse to his power and will. It is evidently an active force, and therefore cannot be ascrib'd to matter, which is wholly and essentially unactive; and whatever appearance of action it has, can only be by the contact of its superficial parts; whereas the force of gravity penetrates to the centers of all bodies, and affects them at the greatest distance. Either therefore it must be the immediate operation of the first Cause himself, or of an inferior agent by his direction, acting constantly and uniformly on every part of corporeal nature. Other instances might be given, to shew that the material world is govern'd by the influence of single causes producing a great diversity of effects, according to the

the different nature of the subjects they work upon; as in the general laws of motion, the various operations of fire, the almost numberless effects which depend upon the constant unvaried nature and properties of water, and many more. But that of gravity mention'd before, is the most universal that we know, and the most satisfying to inquisitive minds; as to a careful attention to it, and diligent observation of its effects, are owing the greatest modern improvements in natural philosophy, all directly leading to this conclusion, that God himself, by his own interposition, wisely and constantly guides, what is commonly called the course of nature.

I shall not insist on the principal appearances of the animal life, which are not to be attributed to mechanism, depending on gravity, tho' some have vainly attempted to account for them that way. This however may be observ'd concerning them, that they seem to be laid on one general uniform foundation. As there are common mediums by which the images or impressions of material objects are convey'd to sensitive beings, so the perceptions rais'd in them which are similar, as far as we can judge, not arising from the nature of things, (for no man can account for the particular sensations in animals from the figure and other primary qualities, or from the motion of the bodies which occasion them;) they must proceed from a general law of nature, or, which means the same thing, the uniform operation of the first supreme Cause. In the same manner, the instincts and appetites of animals, determining them by a short and easy method to use the necessary means of their own preservation, and of such enjoyment as they are capable of, must be resolv'd into the uniform direction of nature, caring for its own works.

But the moral world is the chief of God's works which we know, wherein his wisdom is principally display'd, and the same character of simplicity, may be justly applied to the constitution by which *it* is govern'd.

vern'd. The main ends of it are the perfection and happiness of intelligent beings, ends most worthy of supreme Goodness; but it is the province of wisdom to direct the means by which they shall be obtain'd. Now to this purpose, the great Author of nature has not given a separate rule to every individual, whereby it should be directed to pursue its own interest independently on all others; but together with self-love, wisely implanted in every one, in order to provide for private happiness, has united them under the general law of benevolence, which attracts free agents into a beautiful harmonious society, as by the force of gravity bodies are united into a regular connected system. What could be better contriv'd to preserve the common peace, and promote the common felicity of a multitude, than to charge every one with the care of his fellows, and make his own happiness depend upon it? And tho' the perfect happiness of mankind in the first stage of their existence is not actually attain'd, that is no argument against the Wisdom of the constitution, nor proves that the Author's intention is frustrated. For as in many other productions of nature, especially in every kind of life, there is a gradual progress, which when compleated, is in the whole kind an admirable instance of the Creator's wise design, tho' during the increase but imperfectly discern'd, and many of the individuals never arrive to it; so the principles planted in the human mind, tending to its own and the common happiness, do not produce their proper effect in some individuals, through their own fault, and not their full effect in the whole of the present state, being a state of appointed imperfection; but they produce even now, such a measure of happiness as is sufficient to justify the wisdom of God in the constitution: And the same Principles rais'd to higher perfection in another state, will, by a more powerful operation fully answering their end in the complete happiness of all and every one,

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more illustriously manifest the infinite understanding, as well as goodness of the supreme Being.

As self-love and benevolence, or the desire of private and public happiness, are not barely enjoin'd by the authority of a Law-giver, but the affections themselves are planted in the heart of every individual, determining them all, as far as free agents in such a state could properly be determin'd, whereby the whole species are wisely directed to pursue the true ends of their being; so these two principles are intended to controul and regulate the exercise of all other affections and passions. It was necessary that the human nature should be furnish'd with inferior private appetites and passions for the purposes of the animal life, and likewise with particular instincts of the public kind, such as compassion, gratitude and natural affection, where nearer attachments and pressing circumstances require a more vigorous and speedy interposal by kind offices, in behalf of some of mankind, than of others; which is evidently serviceable to, and ordain'd for the public good. But the universal principles of dispassionate self-love and benevolence have properly the supremacy in our minds, to moderate the lower springs of action belonging to their several kinds, and to prevent their excesses. If lower selfish desires hurry us with too great violence, they are reasonably restrain'd by calm self-love to the whole of our true interest. If particular instincts determining us to relieve and communicate pleasure to others, carry us at any time beyond their just measure, which is the case with minds in which compassion and natural affection are very strong, they are check'd by a calm consideration of the most public good, which is the governing virtuous principle. And now upon a deliberate view of this whole constitution, as design'd by the Author of nature, must it not be acknowledg'd that wisdom appears in it? Supposing the intention to be the happiness of mankind, the greatest happiness they are capable of, what could be more wisely contriv'd

triv'd for answering the end? These general plain laws universally complied with, and having their full effect, would raise the human nature to its highest perfection, and spread united joy and felicity over the whole kind; and they are made easy to every man by being the dictates of his own mind, and we are prompted to obey them by inclination. And whereas our present condition of being is such as required a variety of particular instincts and determinations to render it the more comfortable, and defend us from some inconveniencies we are liable to, from which variety there might arise an occasion of perplexity in our conduct, by the interfering springs of action; the great ruling principles are always ready at hand, to be applied in every case for our direction.

Perhaps it may be alledg'd, that the proof of the wisdom of God in his works, which has been last insisted on, namely, *that* taken from this consideration, that a vast multitude of effects depends on one, or a few causes; that this, I say, is not conclusive, because we cannot be absolutely certain that it is a method of operation, in itself the best and most effectual for obtaining the ends propos'd; tho' there is an apparent conveniency in it to imperfect agents, whose minds might be embarrass'd with a multiplicity of means, and their power insufficient for a great diversity of operations at the same time; but this reason cannot affect the infinite understanding of the supreme Being. Without entering into this inquiry, (which is perhaps too difficult for us,) or pretending to prove that the method of operation which the Author of nature has plainly chosen, is more excellent and reasonable in itself abstractly considered, and with respect to him; I shall only answer to the objection, that since God graciously intended to make his ways known to his intelligent creatures, and to manifest his wisdom so as they might be able to discern it, the method he has taken is on that account, and to answer that end, absolutely the best. If the manner of working had been

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intirely different; if the means had been as various as the particular ends accomplish'd by them; if there had been as great a diversity of causes in nature, as of effects, and every design carried on by a distinct method of proceeding;—This might have been as effectual for any thing we know, and we are sure no more difficult to Omnipotence and infinite Understanding. But then it must have been to us utterly incomprehensible; and minds so limited as ours are, indeed any finite minds, could have had very little knowledge of the wisdom of God. Whereas in the present constitution, he has so accommodated the methods of his operation to the capacities of his intelligent creatures, that the *invisible things of him may be clearly seen by them*, and they may trace the footsteps of his perfection in the things which he has made, which is the foundation both of their duty and their happiness, affording a most delightful entertainment to their minds, and directing them to form the measures of their conduct.

But one observation is necessary to be added, that tho' God has given us clear manifestations of his wisdom, and sufficient for our conviction, if we do not wilfully shut our eyes against the light which breaks in upon us from every part of the known universe, from the constitution and the government of the inanimate, the sensitive, and the rational creatures; yet a great deal does and must still remain secret to us. There are treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in him, which we cannot possibly comprehend; indeed the intire scheme of his counsels and works can be known to no understanding but his own. Every attentive person must be sensible, that our knowledge of nature is very imperfect. Our senses, which convey to us the ideas of material existence, are confin'd within a narrow sphere. We have reason to believe there are vast regions in the universe beyond the reach of their discernment; and by what peculiar methods they may be govern'd, different from those which take place

place in our system, we cannot pretend to judge. There may be also, no doubt there are, other orders of intelligent beings besides mankind; and the laws by which they are ruled may differ in some particulars, from those which are given to us. Besides, of the things which fall under our observation, nay, which we are most familiarly conversant with, there are a great many properties and relations; indeed their very essences, the foundation of all their properties, are unknown to us. They are only the external appearances of things which we observe, and their connexions and dependencies are the subject of human science; but their intimate natures from which these appearances flow, are unknown. But shall we from our own ignorance, infer a defect of wisdom in the supreme Maker and Disposer of the universe? On the contrary, it ought to be allow'd, that if there be satisfying evidence of wisdom in all his works which we know, there is no reason to doubt of it in those parts which are remote from our view, or too deep for our penetration. What mind can be so weak or so prejudic'd as to suppose, that indeed wisdom rules in all that we see, (the regularity and harmony of things extorts this acknowledgment,) but in all the rest of the universe confusion and discord may reign, and nature be under no wise direction? Wisdom is the perfection of a cause, not of an effect; it belongs to an agent uniformly directing the exertion of his active powers, not confin'd to some of his operations; and therefore, if a being appears to be wise in a great variety of his works which we know, we reasonably conclude that the same wisdom directs the whole of his conduct. This observation, with respect to the works of creation and providence, is justified by experience. For whereas some things in the world, the uses of which were not at all known in the infancy of learning, such as vast tracts of mountains, barren deserts and wide seas, have been strongly insisted on as arguments to show the want of wisdom in the frame of nature; these

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very things are since found, by later discoveries and a more accurate inquiry, to be highly useful and to serve very important purposes. And as other objections of the same kind derive all their strength only from human ignorance and weakness, a more thorough knowledge would make them all disappear, and establish a conclusion directly contrary to that which unlearned sceptics would infer from them. In the meantime, it shows the most conceited and presumptuous folly for men to censure the Divine administration, merely because there are some things in it which they cannot comprehend, when the general voice of nature and providence proclaims it wise.

The proper use to be made of this doctrine is, that we should praise God. *All his works praise him* by manifesting his wisdom; and we whom he has made capable of discerning the characters and evidences of that perfection, owe him the tribute of the highest honour and esteem. Power may strike our minds with awe, and supreme Majesty make our hearts tremble, but it is wisdom that attracts veneration. In whatever degree any agent appears to be possess'd of that quality, he is intitled to a proportionable measure of our respect. Wisdom and folly make the principal distinction among men, by which they are held in reputation or contempt. Tho' the differences of outward condition may be often too much regarded, and men of servile spirits may flatter the rich and great in their folly, while the *poor man's wisdom is despised*; yet the language of the heart is different, and true wisdom, wherever it is found, necessarily commands our inward esteem. But what is all the wisdom of men, or indeed the largest finite understandings, but an imperfect glimpse, when compared with the intellectual perfection of the Father of lights?

As praise is the noblest employment of the mind, one can't but be sensible of dignity and self-worth in doing honour to transcendent excellence, by affectionate acknowledgments and applauses; so it is a most delightful

delightful exercise; pleasure is inseparable from the hearty congratulation; and the soul even partakes of the intellectual and moral perfection, which it joyfully celebrates. And since the consciousness of dignity, and the delight which accompanies praise, must always bear a proportion to the apprehended excellency of the object, the praise which is given to the supreme Being, with understanding and sincere esteem, must, on this account, infinitely exceed all others. It is therefore most becoming such imperfect rational creatures as we are, to contemplate the works of God, with this design, that we may discern the manifestations of his wisdom in them, and thereby excite in ourselves those pious and devout affections, and that superlative respect, which are the very essence of praise, as it is a reasonable and moral service.

Any one who attentively considers the frame and condition of human nature in this world, must see, that tho' its capacities are great, and visibly intended for important ends, yet this our infancy of being, is very weak; that the present is a state of probation, wherein the progress of our understandings and our moral powers, with the enjoyment arising from them, in a great measure depend upon such a diligent use of our own faculties, as a careful attention to the nature and order of them will direct. The first impressions made upon our minds are by sensible objects, and our appetites to them naturally arise, which being customarily indulg'd, the higher powers and affections of the soul are neglected and become weak; yet are we not left without an obvious remedy against this inconvenience and infirmity of our nature. As the least reflection will convince us, that there are higher and nobler powers in our nature, capable of a rational, a more refined and sublime enjoyment, than any which can belong to the animal part of our constitution; so the proper exercise of those higher faculties is naturally pointed out to us, by the work of God's law written upon our hearts, and by the evi-

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But still it is in our power to neglect the culture of the virtuous affections, and to let the natural motives of piety slip out of our minds. Whether we will do so or not is a great part of our trial. This however is certain, that nothing can be more worthy of us, or of more immediate importance to our greatest perfection and happiness, than that we should, with deliberation, design and diligence, apply our selves to the proper exercise and improvement of our rational and moral faculties, in order to establish the supremacy of conscience, and, on that foundation, the inward harmony of the mind, and to obtain that enjoyment which naturally arises from universally self-approving, virtuous integrity. But tho' this be evidently rational and important, (scarcely will any thing be alledg'd in justification of the contrary;) yet how few are there of mankind, even of those who are in reputation for wisdom and virtue, who make it their business to cultivate their rational and moral capacities, or have ever taken a resolution to make that their chief care through the course of their lives? For the most part, we learn our piety and virtue, as a foreign discipline, and only by outward instruction. Therefore it sits so awkwardly upon us, and the exercise of it is attended with little of such dexterity, vigour, warmth of affection and pleasure, as accompany the business of nature, which religion really is, in itself, and in the primary way God has taken to teach it to us, that is, by writing its main principles and instructions upon our hearts.

If we are sincerely dispos'd to employ our selves in this excellent, this comprehensive duty of praising God, wherein our best affections join their force, and all the springs of manly pleasure unite in raising the satisfaction of the mind; if, I say, we are sincerely dispos'd to employ ourselves in it, the means are ready at hand. The works of God, in a most amazing and beautiful instructive variety, present themselves

to us with their manifestations of his wisdom; they pour their evidence from all quarters, and into all the avenues of the mind, inviting us to behold perfect counsel and wise design, which is the most agreeable object we can contemplate. There is no part of the universe to which we can turn our attention, nor any species of beings in it, that does not afford us the plainest discoveries of Divine skill and power in their formation and œconomy. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work: Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air teach us, and the fishes of the sea declare to us,* that he is perfectly wise who gave them their being, and appointed their various uses, with all the circumstances of their condition. In this view *the work of the Lord appears honourable and glorious,* and it is *sought out of them that have pleasure therein.* They trace the signatures of counsel upon it, with the highest admiration, and their hearts are fill'd with joy and praise. A heart full of such sentiments will be its own instructor in religion, and needs not to be taught from abroad what duty it owes to God, what love and gratitude, what confidence, obedience and resignation

Providence, as I have already observ'd, has afforded us great and peculiar advantages for making proficiency in this kind of knowledge, and thereby advancing in substantial piety. Some eminent persons in these last days, and that part of the world where we live, have happily employ'd an uncommon capacity in searching out the works of nature, and illustrating the marvelous displays of Divine wisdom in them; so that the subject appears in quite a different light from what it has hitherto done, and is even brought down to the level of vulgar understandings. What has been sometimes called philosophy, the vain, the poor production of impiety, ignorance and pride, was really what the Apostle calls, *the wisdom, through which the world knew not God.* But happy our times! wherein

wherein whatever is worthy to be called learning evidently terminates in religion as its last result, and shews us *all things full of God*. Let us pursue the method which has been so clearly mark'd out to us. Let those whose talents and leisure enable them, endeavour to build a farther superstructure on the noble foundation already laid, and by investigating the secrets of nature, so far as human understanding can reach, discern the counsels of its Author, that they may give him due praise. And let them who are unqualified for such an undertaking, yet study to be acquainted with the useful discoveries others have made; and by affectionate meditation on them, feed the pure flame of rational devotion in their own breasts.

But above all kinds of natural knowledge there is one branch which may be most profitably improv'd to the purposes of religion, by contemplating the wisdom of God in it; I mean the philosophy of human nature itself, not only or principally of the corporeal part, tho' even *that* is a wonderful work of God, a most curious structure, wherein divine wisdom shines conspicuously. It is indeed surprizing, that any who have studied the animal constitution and œconomy, should forget God its Maker. Others, we know, have made many just and pious reflection upon it, as an admirable monument of the Creator's skill, wherein he has shewed himself *great in counsel and wonderful in working*. But what I chiefly aim at is, that we should apply ourselves to the serious consideration of our more inward fabric, that of mind, whereby we are distinguish'd with the character of rational creatures. Of all the external objects we discern, bearing, in a vast variety, the marks of the Creator's intelligence and power, there is none which has any resemblance to this. It has no shape or colour, or any other sensible quality; yet there is nothing more real, nothing more important to us. We are conscious of its various, many of them deeply interesting, perceptions and operations, accompanied

with different kinds and degrees of pleasure and pain. This object, intimately near us, (for 'tis that whereby we are what we are, *our very selves*,) will, in that view of things we are now considering, appear most worthy of our first and careful attention. To this purpose, some of the principal appearances have been observ'd, in the preceding part of this discourse; but in every view we can take of it, it appears a beautiful offspring of God's light, and a noble production of his power. The intellectual and self-determining faculties, the self-reflecting authoritative and controuling judgment of the mind upon its own dispositions and voluntary acts, and the affections to spiritual and moral objects, characters and actions;—These are subjects of contemplation, to which we meet with nothing parallel in the whole of material nature. And when, in conjunction with them, we consider the other subordinate powers and determinations of the human soul, its senses, appetites and passions; there is a beautiful scene open'd to us, wherein we may entertain ourselves most agreeably, and be furnish'd with excellent arguments of praise to our great and wise Creator. This Divine workmanship appears a regular system, comprehending a multitude of parts, but all connected together, and variously related. The great end of a perpetually increasing rational perfection and happiness, is plainly intended, and the means are excellently fitted to it. There are many inferior powers, instincts and affections, each serving a several useful purpose, and having pleasure annex'd to it, but all in subordination to the ultimate end, which nature directs us steddily to pursue. In a system so various, containing so many different powers and springs of action, of opposite tendency, it can scarcely be expected, at least in its infancy and state of appointed imperfection, but that some disorders should happen; and so we find it in fact. But still the remedy is in the soul itself; by the proper exertion of its own power, there is provision made for inward order, harmony and peace, which

which is the natural, healthful and happy state of the mind. This science, like others, has had its vicissitudes; sometimes in a more flourishing, sometimes in a declining state. Some eminent attempts have, of late, been made to rescue it from the obscurity and ignorance of the barbarous middle ages. But that every man, for himself, may study it successfully, nothing is more necessary than frequent, careful and unprejudic'd self-inspection; whereby pious affections will be excited in our minds, and we shall be led to ascribe, *to the only wise God all honour and glory for ever.*

2dly, As by the manifestation of God's wisdom in the frame and constitution of things, we are directed to celebrate his praises with understanding and sincere affection; so by the continued exercise of the same glorious attribute in his government of the world, we are encourag'd to trust in him at all times and in all circumstances, if we sincerely endeavour to approve ourselves to him by imitating his moral perfections, and obeying his laws (the only condition upon which, by the very constitution of our nature, we can have confidence towards God;) for he has the whole series of events under his direction, appointing even the remotest issues of them. Vain are the contrivances of wicked mortals, against the gracious designs of providence towards good men; *the counsels of the froward are turned headlong*, their mischievous purposes are disappointed, *for the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptations.* We ought not to pronounce judgment upon the first face of things, nor be greatly discouraged because of irregular appearances. We may be assured they are no more than appearances, for it is impossible there should be any real disorder, where infinite Wisdom rules. And tho' our knowledge of particular events is very short, this may always yield us satisfaction, and support our hope, that the whole course of nature, and all the vicissitudes of human affairs are govern'd by perfect reason.

Here is, one would think, a solid foundation of

inward tranquillity to intelligent creatures, and a relief under all their anxieties for the future. For what could a rational being desire, but that eternal unerring reason should direct the series of events, and determine what comes to pass? If, in fact, the world be so govern'd, and our persuasion of it rests upon solid grounds, this must be delightful to the human mind, a never-failing spring of consolation. Supposing on the contrary, that there were no such thing as counsel in the government of the universe, but that all things were guided by blind chance or necessity; how must this dissipate the vigour of the soul, disorder all its powers, and fill it with horror? The present state, and indeed the whole of existence, would then be, in the strictest and most proper Sense, as *Job* represents the state of death, * *a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.* But since it is not so, since *the only wise God reigneth, his counsel standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations,* let all the rational inhabitants of the earth rejoice, and the multitude of the isles be glad thereof. What can give greater satisfaction and inward security to a considerate unprejudic'd mind? For, upon this principle, the last result of all things must be, just as such a mind would wish it to be.

Lastly, We ought always to acquiesce in the present disposition of things by Divine providence, and comply with its counsels, as far as we know them. God's ways are unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out; but when he is pleas'd to show his purposes in particular events, tho' we cannot discern the reasons of them and their full design, it becomes us to submit, not because of his sovereign dominion, (which, abstracting from the consideration of his wisdom, can never produce a rational resignation, nor satisfy our understandings any more than unintelligent fate, the blind idol of *Atheists*;) but because we know he is infinitely

* *Job* x. 22.

initely wise, who in these instances declares his will. He has, 'tis true, given us understanding, and we should use it in the best manner we can, for the direction of our own practice. Prudence however will direct such as are conscious of their own weakness, to carry it with great deference to acknowledg'd superior understanding, and hearken to instruction. But surely the very imperfect understandings of men, should never exalt themselves against the perfect Wisdom which rules the universe. Therefore when God is pleas'd to interpose by disappointing our designs, and breaking our measures, the humblest resignation is our unquestionable duty; and what he has plainly discover'd to be the design and appointment of his providence, we should chearfully submit to, because we are sure it is wisest in the whole: still remembering, as a first maxim, and of the utmost importance, that what God has evidently shown, by the clear light of our own reason, to be the proper ends of our being, these we ought constantly to pursue, and inviolably adhere to that invariable rule which he has given us for the conduct of life. We cannot fathom the depth of his wisdom, nor know the secret of his counsels; *but unto man he has said, * Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

* Job xxviii. 28.

DISCOURSE VII.

The Goodness of GOD, proved from
his Works,

[A B E R N E T H Y.]

MARK X. 18.

There is none good but one, that is God.

AS *goodness*, in general, is a most amiable subject of meditation, it is impossible for the human heart designedly and deliberately to think of it without pleasure. The goodness of the Deity is in a peculiar manner, above his other-perfections, attractive of our highest esteem and delight. They are all excellent in themselves, absolute, independent of any other being, necessary as his existence, and infinite: but beneficence finishes his character, which is the just object of our adoration, our reverence and love, the foundation of our hope and confidence in him, and most worthy to be imitated by us, as far as our limited capacity and the frailty of our nature will allow. The consideration of eternity and immensity, of power and wisdom, nay, and of holiness and justice, abstracting from love and kindness, may strike the mind with admiration and awe; but the bounty of God to all sensitive, and especially rational creatures, his opening his hand liberally,

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and giving them that which is convenient for them, suitable to their several natures,---This inspires the heart of man with hope and joy, excites the best affections, and makes all the rest of the divine attributes appear most lovely.

I intend afterwards more particularly to explain this subject. My present design is to prove that God is good. Some have endeavoured to prove all his moral attributes, and particularly his goodness, from his natural perfections; and their reasoning seems to be very strong. As morality has a necessary foundation in the nature and reason of things, independently on, and antecedently to all will, and positive appointment; (for the essences of things being different, there must be different relations, and agreeableness and disagreeableness of some to others, and particularly a suitableness of certain conditions and circumstances to certain persons, or their characters and qualifications;) so this necessarily appears to the human understanding; and we cannot help thinking it appears to every understanding, more or less clearly, according to the measure of its perfection; and every intelligent agent must of necessity, (not natural but moral, consistent with the most perfect freedom,) direct his actions by that distinction of fit and unfit, so far as it is known to him, unless he be hindered by impotence or wrong affection. Now the supreme cause of all things being absolutely perfect, self-existent, independent, and unchangeable, his understanding infinite, his power almighty; as he discerns all the relations and even possibilities of things; no reason can possibly be imagined why he ~~should~~ not always act according to these invariable respects, which he has made every intelligent creature capable of seeing, and thereby capable of approving and praising his administration. He can never mistake evil for good, or fail in distinguishing the true limits of fit and unfit. There is no superior power to controul or restrain him in doing what he thinks most reasonable to be done.

He is infinitely above all indigence, or want of any thing to make him perfectly easy and happy; and therefore his mind cannot be biased by any selfish or partial affections, which are in other agents the sources of offence against the eternal rule of right. In particular, the supreme Being must be good, or inclined to communicate happiness, because he is in himself, and was from eternity, perfectly and unchangeably happy, and therefore cannot be supposed to have designed the production of any kind or degree of unhappiness, unless his wisdom should foresee it might be a means of greater good in the end. Nor indeed can it be supposed, that such a Being could have another motive to make any creatures at all than to communicate good in such variety, and always in such proportion, as to his infinite wisdom should seem meet. That God is beneficent also appears from his absolute all-sufficiency, whereby he is at an infinite distance from malice, envy, and all temptations to do evil. For these malevolent dispositions, and every disposition contrary to goodness, as they are known to be tormenting to the mind in which they are seated, so they always proceed, and in their nature must proceed, from weakness and imperfection.

But, though this reasoning may be very convincing to some attentive persons, yet another, and a larger method of illustrating the subject before us, may be more generally useful, which therefore I shall endeavour in the following discourse; namely, by considering the genuine fruits of goodness apparent in the works and ways of God, or in his constitution of things, and administration of providence. To which purpose it is only necessary to observe, that the evidence of the divine goodness is the same with the evidence of that disposition in any other being, as the principle itself is the same in kind though different in the degree of its perfection. If a designing cause actually produces those effects, which in their nature and tendency are beneficial to other beings, and

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and we see no reason to think that he acts upon selfish principles, we cannot help concluding that he is beneficent. Now it has been proved, that God is the supreme intelligent designing cause of all things in the universe; he has disposed its form, fixed its order, the relations, the connexion and dependence of all its parts, and the harmony of the whole; that he continually superintends and irresistibly governs it, being every where present, and every where exercising his power and wisdom. And therefore if in the intire state of things, and series of events; it appears that there are many benefits actually conferred, and much happiness actually communicated to beings which are capable of it, (various happiness suitable to their various natures and conditions, either in their possession, or placed within their reach, so that by the proper use of their own powers they may attain it; and at the same time they have a sufficient direction as to the manner of attaining it;) if, I say, these things be so, and this apparently prevalent in the constitution of nature, and the administration of providence, as far as our knowledge extends, then we do justly infer, that the author of nature and governor of the world is good or benevolent.

It is true indeed that a vast variety of creatures in the universe are not proper objects of beneficence, and therefore the manifestation of *this*, is not altogether so extensive as of the other divine attributes. In all the kinds of inanimate things, from the most magnificent celestial orbs to the lowest pebble or grain of sand on the earth, the wisdom and power of the Creator are displayed; but they are capable of no enjoyment, and consequently the goodness of God can no otherwise *properly* be said to be manifested in them, than as they are the means of happiness to sensitive or intelligent beings. But as we cannot certainly know, that any part of the universe is wholly uninhabited by living creatures; and as its principal parts and appearances have an evident relation

lation to life, and are useful to its preservation and entertainment; so this system which we are best acquainted with, would be but very imperfectly understood, and a wrong judgment made of it, if it were considered only as dead nature; as a curious fabric indeed, but unrelated to, and not made for the use of the animated kinds which dwell in it, and which we cannot avoid thinking to be a superior and more perfect rank of beings. As for the earth, it seems to have been chiefly intended as a dwelling-place for animals, and all its parts and productions principally designed for their conveniency. We cannot take upon us so peremptorily to judge, what the main ends are of those moving globes in our heavens, which do all of them, in common with this terrestrial one, partake of the vital heat and light of the sun; and which, though appearing to our naked eyes very small because of their distance, are really of a vast magnitude. It is not improbable, that as they seem to be well fitted for it by their situation, they are inhabited by rational creatures who there celebrate the praises of their maker, and pay him their homage, being, as we are, the monuments of his bounty. But however that be, we reasonably conclude, that the uses which we see some of the far distant orbs do serve, those the wise author of nature designed they should serve: and if they are of great importance to animal and intelligent beings, he is good in appointing them for such uses. Especially the sun, that glorious orb, the perpetual source of light and warmth, though it may answer ends above our comprehension, and may be fitted to other parts of the world in the same way it is to this we live on, or in different ways; yet upon the partial view we have of it, and of its various usefulness to the inhabitants of the earth, we reasonably judge that it is designed to be beneficial; and that therefore the maker of it is beneficent.

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From what has been said, it appears that one proper illustration of the present subject will be, by considering the visible frame of inanimate nature which falls within our observation, and its most obvious appearances, as they relate to animal and rational life, which afford us a strong convincing evidence of the Creator's bounty. It has been observed on another occasion, that the apparent relation between the parts of the mundane system, particularly the constant conveyance of light and heat from the sun to the earth, causing such a variety of productions on its surface, and of so manifold use to its inhabitants, that we cannot conceive how they could possibly subsist without them, (which light and heat are so conveniently distributed by means of the daily and annual revolutions, that all parts of our globe, have, in their turns, such supplies as are necessary for the living creatures which dwell in them,) it has, I say, been observed, that this is a clear evidence of *design* in the frame of the world. But the same argument as fully proves *good design*; that is, a design of doing good to a multitude of sensitive and intelligent beings. Will we call a man beneficent who employs his time, his labour, and treasure, for relieving the indigent, for preserving life, and rendering it comfortable? And shall we not acknowledge him a kind and generous Being, who has so contrived the fabric of the world, and so constantly directs its regular motions, that by them all the species of living creatures upon the earth, and mankind at the head of them, are daily nourished, and have a vast variety of enjoyment? The uniform appearance which there is in the face of nature, and the constant course it keeps, makes the continual, intelligent, and beneficent direction of its author, to be overlooked by those ungrateful and unthoughtful mortals, who stupidly attribute the benefits they constantly receive, to a kind of undesigning necessity; whereas to an attentive mind, the power of God appears

appears as much in the ordinary works of nature, as in the most miraculous interpositions. His bounty appears by its constant, yet voluntary communication; so much the more to be admired, because thus it is manifested to be a never-failing principle: and the sun's visiting the earth every day, is a daily fresh instance of his favour; the suspension whereof, for a very short time, which he could as easily effect, (and goodness only prevents it,) would involve all the animals of the earth in the utmost horror, nay inevitable ruin.

Again; if we look into the constitution of this lower world itself, which can only be attributed to the will of the wise Creator as its cause, it will lead us by the same sort of reasoning to the acknowledgment of his liberality. There is an admirable correspondence between the parts of the terraqueous globe, whereby it is made a convenient habitation for the various tribes of animals which it sustains. The thin fluid that surrounds it is immediately necessary to the preservation of their lives, by breathing, as well as for the transmission of light, and nourishing warmth from the sun: its solid parts support heavy living bodies; and it is every where so well supplied with water in perpetual courses, and by refreshing showers, as to answer sufficiently, every where, the purpose of producing food for them, and to furnish them with drink, besides other conveniences of life. The several kinds have their proper elements assigned them, to which they are fitted by their make; and there is suitable provision made for them. The sea and the rivers are stored with scaly inhabitants, which pass through them with ease and pleasure, having organs adapted to that purpose, and abundance of food convenient for them: but they cannot live on dry land; which, in its turn, is appropriated to other species: and they, by a quite different organization of their bodies, are fitted to move on it with equal ease; and have the means of their

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their subsistence plentifully afforded them. None of these can mount up into the air; which yet is visited by several sorts of animals that wing their way through its regions, and by it easily ascend to the tops of mountains and tall trees, where they find both nourishment and shelter. Now is it not a just and obvious reflection on all this?---That God has diffused his bounty every where, and that all his works which come under our observation, are filled with the fruits of it. Neither earth, nor air, nor sea, are empty of living inhabitants, which he provides for. No place is without many witnesses of his liberality; and life is the care of his providence. What human heart can be so insensible, as not to join with the pious psalmist in celebrating the praise of the divine wisdom and goodness? *The earth is full of thy riches, O Lord, so is the great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. These wait all upon thee, that thou mayst give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather; thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good* *.

In the next place, as the animal life considered by itself, (especially its principal appearances, sensation and spontaneous motion,) is a convincing evidence of the being of God, or of an intelligent agent who made the world; so it carries in it a very strong argument of his goodness. It is indeed the lowest immediate object of his goodness that we know, because its perceptions and enjoyments are of the lowest kind: but the benevolent disposition will always incline any agent to give pleasure rather than pain; and it is a plain instance of the Creator's benignity, that he has made even this low life with a capacity of some happiness; and provided for it all the happiness it is capable of. The animal constitution is such, that in every species of it we may observe a curious texture of the interior vital parts guarded by a strong outside; whereby it is preserved

* Psal. civ. 25, 27, 28.

from those things which might be hurtful to its tender frame, and enabled to perform its proper functions without pain. The organs of sense are so situated as to convey the necessary notices for the safety and benefit of the whole body; and its instincts are all plainly fitted to its condition, determining it to that which is useful for its preservation, and to such enjoyment as is suitable to it. But these self-motions, sensations, and the following of instincts, are accompanied with a kind of gratification, so that the sensitive life itself is not dragged on with sorrow, nor is altogether joyless and insipid; but in its measure, partakes the bounty of kind provident nature. Of this, many species of the brutes give plain enough discoveries. With what ease and natural indications of delight, do the herds graze in their pastures? They sport in their manner, and play, satisfied with their portion, and as enjoying all that nature craves. The birds sing their chearful notes, and mount upwards with their signs of joy, as contented with what liberal nature has bountifully dispensed to them.

But of animal enjoyment we have a more direct and immediate knowledge by what we feel in ourselves: having senses and appetites very much resembling those of the inferior kinds, we cannot but know what a variety of gratification arises from them; and thereby are led to acknowledge a large manifestation of the divine liberality, diffused thro' the whole extent of sensitive nature.

Another observation concerning all sorts of animals that we know is obvious to every one; namely, that their affections do not wholly terminate in themselves. Besides the instincts which relate only to every individual, whereby it is determined to seek its private good, such as food, sleep, and other necessary refreshment, they have strong attachments to their kinds, and inclinations prompting them to be useful to one another. Some live in a sort of regular society,

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ty, resembling a human common-wealth; especially the feebler kinds, which have the greatest need of mutual aid. The savage beasts, however destructive they may be to other species, are, in their rough manner, affectionate to their own: and the tamer beasts flock together when any danger threatens them; and the strong do not save themselves by flight, but run hazards, and will engage in painful struggles for the defence of the weak. What labour and difficulty, nay extreme sufferings, will the dam undergo for her young, regardless of ease and life itself? So strong is natural affection in her! There seems indeed, farther, to be an established general relation between the species themselves, and a bond of union to run through the whole animal Kingdom; so that the interests of the several tribes do not in the main interfere, but rather, they are mutually useful to each other; especially as there is a visible subordination, the lower kinds are evidently serviceable to the superior, and seem to be made for their use. Above all, the very highest of the brutal species, are either willingly, or by a superiority of power and understanding, made unwillingly subject to mankind. Such an œconomy in the whole, tending to the common good, and to render all the individuals, and all the kinds, as publickly useful as they can be, shows a benevolent intention in the wise super-intending disposer.

This observation is founded on the general state and order of animals which fully justifies it. Some particular exceptions there may be: not only individuals, which have somewhat unnatural in their dispositions whereby they are pernicious to others of their kind; but whole species which do not to us appear to be useful in the earth; on the contrary, they are destructive to the best of the brutes, and are enemies to men. But these are rare instances, and the effects of them do not reach so far as to be dangerous to any species of living creatures. The strength

strength of the argument lies in this ; That good is evidently prevalent in the constitution of nature ; and not only the individuals, but the kinds of animals, are under a general law of sympathy, whereby they are useful, rather than hurtful to each other ; conspiring together, as parts of one whole, to promote the common safety and happiness ; which plainly shews a beneficent design in the author of the system. If some few examples can be alledged which have a contrary appearance, That ought not to be urged as an objection against what is *so evidently* the general, and effectually prevailing intention of nature : rather it becomes us to acknowledge our own ignorance, than rashly to censure the works of providence which we cannot comprehend. It is certain, that may have the appearance of ill, upon a slight and imperfect view, which in the whole may be good : and those parts of the creation, particularly some animals, which seem to our short and narrow understanding useless, nay hurtful, may yet answer some important and beneficial purposes in the intire œconomy of nature, tho' we do not at present perceive it.

Again, as thus there appears upon the face of the animal Kingdom a regular œconomy, and an union of interests and affections, whereby good is predominant in the whole, manifesting good in the design and contrivance of the author and ruler ; so there is a very remarkable *variety* which discovers the wisdom of God. For a diversity of regular productions shews the understanding as well as the liberty of an agent. But this, instead of being any diminution of his goodness, shews it in a stronger and clearer light. For it shews, that the benevolent principle is not confined to one method of manifestation, but that the exercise of it is suited to every exigency of all the objects which are capable of it. The unexhausted fountain flows in various streams, satisfying every living thing with that which is convenient for it. Besides, no one kind could so replenish the earth with inhabitants, the monuments

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numents of the Creator's bounty, as now it is replenished; nor could an equal multitude of one kind be so well furnished with the necessaries of life by its productions, as the different kinds are. Men would increase no farther than they do, if there were no brutes; nor would they be better accomodated: on the contrary, they would want many advantages for the comfortable enjoyment of life, which they now possess. One of the brutal species does not hinder the increase, or the subsistence of another; but there is a liberal, and for the most part, a different provision made for every one of them. So that the multiform appearance of the sensible life is only a more extensive object for the divine munificence to display itself upon. Animals indeed, have different kinds and degrees of perfection and enjoyment. Some have powers and faculties which others want. Some are fitted for quick motion; others are made for strength. Some are endued with a greater sagacity than others; and man excels them all in intellectual powers. But it does not follow that God is not good to all, because he has not made them all equal. Goodness is a principle which does not exert itself to the utmost of the agent's power, in every single effect he produces. When conducted by wisdom, its exercise is accomodated to the condition of the objects; or if the whole of their existence and state depends upon it, (which is the case of all creatures with respect to God,) it manifests itself in the variety of its gifts. But whatever distinction there may be, and however some may be dignified and made happy above others, there is no pretence for a complaint against the goodness of the Creator, from the condition he appoints to any creature, when good is prevalent in it, and it is better than non-existence.

The duration of the animal life is fixed by the meer pleasure of its author, as well as the degrees of its perfection while it does continue. And it may be longer or shorter, just as he thinks fit, without any

reproach on his beneficence. If upon the whole, its existence is preferable to the contrary, as having in it more pleasure than pain, (besides its being part of a good system, and useful to superior life,) the shortness of its continuance can no more reasonably be objected against the Creator's goodness, than the imperfection of its frame and state when compared with creatures of a higher rank. Is not God to be acknowledged good to his living creatures on the earth, if he communicates to them all the happiness they are capable of, though he does not perpetuate their being? And is not a measure of enjoyment distributed among a multitude of short-lived beings as great a manifestation of benevolence, as the same measure of enjoyment continued longer in the possession of a few? I observe this to shew that the preservation of the animal species in a succession of individuals, (which is the established law of their nature,) is no ground of objection against the goodness of God to them; since if by that method the exercise of it to *some* is shortened in duration, the objects of it are multiplied, and it is exercised towards a greater number. Nor is it any imputation on a regular good œconomy, that some individuals of the different kinds, in their several successions, devour others. For what disadvantage is it to a short-lived animal, or how is it inconsistent with the goodness of providence, that after it has enjoyed the happiness that is suitable to its condition, it falls at last a sacrifice to a superior nature, and so serves the good of the whole? Thus it plainly appears, that the care of divine providence extends to the earth and all its inhabitants. It is made a convenient place of abode for living creatures, and is plentifully stocked with them. If one considers the number of them, it is amazing how they should be provided for, yet not one of them is *forgotten before God*. They all live plentifully, on the alms of his bounty. *Their eyes wait upon him, and he gives them their meat in due season; he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.*

These are, indeed, the lowest objects of his beneficence, but since they are not neglected, much more may we be assured, that beings of a superior order and dignity partake of his goodness, in a way suitable to their nature.

Let us proceed to higher instances of the divine benevolence ; and of which we ourselves are directly and immediately the conscious witnesses. Man is the principal inhabitant of this lower world ; and in every light in which we view him, he will appear to be the monument of his Creator's bounty. If we consider the life which he has in common with other animals, it is cared for and enriched like theirs, by the liberality of providence. It is adorned with a variety of senses and appetites, which afford various entertainment, being all provided with objects suitable to them. He has food convenient for him, and all his frequently returning wants plentifully supplied. But the human nature is distinguished, even in this lower part of it, from all other sensitive beings, by many and great advantages in its constitution. The exterior form itself has a visible pre-eminence above the brutal shapes, by the delicacy of its composition, its erect posture, a beautiful countenance, and organs fitted for a vastly wider compass of perception, and a vastly greater variety of action. The tokens of man's supremacy upon earth are so visible, that the greatest part of the other kinds, some of them far superior in bodily strength, seem to be sensible of it. They acknowledge him their Lord, and in their way pay him homage, with little difficulty being brought to spend their lives in his service. Especially, that *Reason* which is our chief prerogative, and considered by itself is a fund of noble enjoyment, (therefore a separate clear demonstration of the goodness of God,) Reason, I say, as it is joined to the lower part of our constitution, does greatly embellish and enoble it. The brutes go on in one perpetual track by the direction of their instincts. Between eating, drinking, a few other animal func-

ons, and rest, their time is consumed, till the perishable machine, made only for a short duration, fails from inward disorders, or yields to external violence. But man, by his superior understanding, is taught to enjoy life at a higher rate; it is diversified with much more pleasure, and takes in a great number of entertaining objects.

It is true, the brutes seem to have some advantages above us. They quickly arrive at maturity, and are enabled to shift for themselves. Nature has provided them with the means of subsistence, without any forethought; and with instruments of defence against foreign injuries, which they have skill to use without any instructor. The hardy frame of their bodies make them easy, uncovered, in the open air; and the bare earth is a pleasant resting-place for them. Whereas man, a helpless creature in infancy, long nourished by the tender care of others, even when grown to his full vigour, and the perfect use of all his faculties, cannot enjoy life in any tolerable manner without a great expence of thought and labour. His feeble constitution needs a great deal of art to preserve it. Great pains must be bestowed on preparing a mansion for him; much industry used for his clothing; and forecast, with diligence as well as frugal management, in providing, and keeping for him constant supplies of food. But all these inconveniences are abundantly compensated by other privileges of his nature; especially, the inward powers and affections, wherewith he is endued, which enable and direct him to improve life, and exalt the enjoyment of it to a high degree of perfection, beyond what any other animal ever did, or can attain to. *The inspiration of the Almighty, which has given us understanding and taught us more than the beasts of the field*, qualifies us for contriving means in order to render our condition easy and comfortable, far beyond what their instincts prompt them to. But when to this is added the social affections planted in every human heart, disposing mankind for the supply

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of their common necessities to join counsels together, and to be mutually assisting to each other, (which they can the more easily do because of the excellent faculty they have of communicating their thoughts by speech,) and to form themselves into regular societies, for preserving order and encouraging arts and industry;—All these advantages taken together cast the ballance so sensibly on our side, that not only they *may* render, but actually have rendered human life abundantly more noble and elegant. We look down upon the brutal as low and mean, nay as void of happiness in comparison.

But this is not the chief pre-eminence of man above the beasts. If we consider the superior part of his constitution abstractly, and without regard to the influence it has on the animal life, exalting and adoring it,—in this view, he will appear a yet more peculiar and illustrious monument of his Creator's goodness. Every one who attends to the powers of reflection and reasoning, must be conscious of a sublime excellence in them. As a great variety of ideas arise in our minds from external objects, the faculty of comparing them, of examining their relations, their agreement and disagreement, and thereupon forming a judgment concerning them,—This faculty, I say, which we perceive in ourselves, is accompanied with a sense of such dignity and perfection, that we cannot but value it as a high prerogative of our nature, and look upon the beings which are void of it, as far inferior to us. Not only so, the intellectual capacity, carefully improved, affords a high enjoyment, which upon comparison appears vastly superior to the pleasures of the senses. It is not limited, as they are, to singular existing objects, and their presence: the mind by its reflecting power reviving the images of things which it once perceived, (besides an immense fund which arises from reflection or attention to its own powers and operations,) can entertain itself agreeably, in the absence of outward objects, with their images which it retains; can inquire

into their properties, and investigate truths concerning them; which are agreeable objects to its perception, even tho' they be mere speculations, not applied to any practical purpose. But if they be so applied, and are found useful in life, which sometimes is the case, the enjoyment is thereby greatly increased. This is a gratification we have always at hand; and the frequent repetition of it does not pall the desire, but whets it rather; it does not occasion satiety and disgust, nor is reviewed with remorse, as sensual pleasures often are; but the mind dwells upon it with delight, and has satisfaction in it, as an exercise and entertainment worthy of itself. Such an application and improvement of the intellectual capacity, gives a high relish to our existence, a consciousness of vast superiority to, nay, by it we seem to enjoy a kind of wide command over, the material world; subjecting the whole of it to examination; separating its nearest parts; uniting its most distant extremes; viewing it on all sides; and so possessing in some sort, whatever is entertaining in it. But by the exercise of this power, we rise in the objects of our knowledge above corporeal nature. We have the ideas of thought, of consciousness, of liberty, of volition, and of moral objects, which have no manner of affinity with extended solid substance, or any of its modes. Thus we are introduced into another world, vastly more delightful than the visible; in the mental survey of which, we may entertain ourselves with high satisfaction. We see an excellent spiritual œconomy in our own constitution; a subordination of powers, and a ballance of affections; we imagine, not without a great probability of truth, superior orders of intelligent beings; and we are convinced by strong arguments, of uncreated original excellence at the head of all, possessed of the highest absolute perfections, the noblest of all objects, in the contemplation of which the mind rests, with the utmost complacency. This part of the human frame carries the plain marks of its author's benevolence. What but supreme goodness could be the motive to a production

duction, so formed, as by its proper and natural operation to yield such noble enjoyment ?

But I will not pretend to examine the parts of our inward constitution minutely. Every power of our nature, and every affection when duly exercised, is naturally attended with enjoyment ; and the harmony of the whole yields a high degree of complicated felicity, which clearly shews that the gracious father of our spirits designed them for happiness. Let us consider that, which is certainly the source of the most intense, sincere, and lasting pleasures, the sense of moral goodness, and the practice of it. That the human mind is made with a knowledge of right and wrong, or of moral good and evil, with their eternal necessary difference, I have endeavoured elsewhere to show, and shall not now repeat it. And that this part of the constitution, (the judgment of rectitude, and the approbation of it with the disposition of our minds towards it,) is good, or that it tends to happiness, and must have been designed by the author of nature, must appear to every considerate person. For, first, let us set before ourselves the idea of virtue in the most abstract way we can think of it ; (it is not difficult for any man to form in his own imagination a good moral character, made up of purity, justice, gratitude, sincerity, and universal benevolence,) nothing appears more amiable to the mind. As from a regularity in the situation of external objects, and a due mixture of sensible qualities or the contrary, there arises an idea of beauty and deformity ; so from good and bad dispositions and actions of moral agents, the ideas of moral beauty and turpitude strike the interior sense of the soul, raising in it the highest approbation or dislike ; so that rectitude, considered only as an object of speculation, yields great pleasure to the mind, and is the loveliest form which can be presented to it. If the external senses which serve the low ends of animal life, and give it pleasure by conveying the images of material objects,

are to be attributed to the goodness of the Creator; much more that more excellent sense which serves nobler purposes, and is attended with higher delight, is a glorious proof of the pleasure he takes in communicating happiness. But morality is intended by the author of the human constitution, not merely as a subject of agreeable meditation; our tempers are to be formed, and our practice regulated by it. There is therefore a high esteem, a strong affection, and an ardent desire to it, excited in the heart of every man who attends to it calmly and deliberately. He cannot think of a state of virtue, otherwise than as the happiest and best that it is possible for him or any rational being to be in: that it is most becoming the rational nature: and an intelligent creature altogether destitute of it, (if there be any such,) is an object of the utmost horror and aversion; that it is most praise-worthy to prefer moral integrity to the gratification of all animal desires, and selfish passions; nay, to despise them, in comparison; and the mind can never be thoroughly easy and satisfied in itself, without resolving to sacrifice every thing in this world to virtue, and to bear the utmost extremity of pain, rather than betray its cause, and depart from its rules.

This shews of what importance morality is in our constitution; and experience will convince us, that the most serene, solid, and lasting joys, perpetually spring from the practice of it. If a man can reflect on good actions done by him from hearty affection and truly virtuous motives, let him judge whether any other satisfaction is equal to that which such reflection yields. It is a pleasure for which he is not indebted to any thing without: it does not depend on variable accidents as sensual gratifications do, which must be supported by foreign objects, and are liable to the changes of their condition and circumstances; besides, the inconstancy of the appetite itself makes animal enjoyment subject to many interruptions, and

the transient pleasure is succeeded with pain, still in proportion to the degree of its vehemence. But *the good man is satisfied from himself*: he possesses an inward tranquillity independent on external events. The vigorous exercise of his own virtuous affections, is accompanied with high delight; the good he communicates to others is reflected back upon himself, and greatly increases his pleasure; he reviews the temper of his mind, and his actions with self-approbation. This is a perpetual spring of undecaying joy, which suffers no abatement by length of time, or change of circumstances. When the mind reflects upon it, it is always fresh; never exhausted, but by repetition strengthened, rather than diminished. No outward calamity or reverse of fortune; not the indisposition of the body, or the approach of death, which quite extinguish all animal enjoyments, can take away the relish of these moral pleasures, which seem to be inseparable from the mind that is qualified for them, in every state of its existence. Must not the virtuous soul retiring into itself, calmly and attentively surveying those its own powers and operations, (a perpetual inward spring of pleasure!) rejoice in its own being, and tracing them back to the true original, the free and kind intention of the designing cause, must it not acknowledge him infinitely good?

It is farther to be remembered, that the tendency of virtue is not merely to the good of every individual, it diffuses its beneficial influence over the whole human species, and promotes their common happiness. This is so evident that I need not insist upon it. Every attentive person must be convinced, that piety, justice, temperance, and charity, universally practised, would render the condition of men in this world as happy as it could possibly be: that the greatest part of the misery which we see and feel, proceeds from the contrary vices; from luxury, injustice, covetousness, wrath, and pride, which only make men enemies and hurtful to one another; and that whatever measure
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of safety and comfort in this life subsists among men, is principally owing to the measure which there is in them of the good and benevolent, or the virtuous affections. And now upon reviewing this part of our constitution, must we not pronounce it very good? Must it not be acknowledged, that the author of it is a kind and benevolent being, and that human nature was made for happiness? Since the principles which lead to it are so deeply wrought into our frame, we pursue it effectually, by following the dictates of our minds, and cannot fail of attaining it, without doing violence to ourselves. If we should suppose a species of creatures constituted after a quite different manner; every individual uneasy to itself, having a quick sense of pain which should arise from a multitude of occasions the most common in life, and should attend the proper exercise of its powers, and render all the functions of nature whereby life is preserved, at least joyless and insipid; at the same time with malevolent dispositions towards its fellows, having no pleasure in social communication with them, but a natural bent towards their misery and destruction; how unhappy must such a state be? And what a frightful idea must we have of the contriver? And yet nothing but the goodness of the Creator could hinder its being actually the condition of created beings; since the whole of their constitution, and every circumstance in it, depends intirely on his pleasure. But when we find ourselves in such a state, that not only we are capable of much enjoyment but prevented with instincts which naturally determine us to it; and not only furnished with selfish affections which terminate in private good, making every one easy to himself, but with publick affections, whereby we are directed to pursue the common happiness of the kind, as inseparable from that of individuals, all conspiring to produce the greatest moment of good which could be produced;—when, I say, we find it so, it would be the utmost ingratitude not

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not to acknowledge the beneficence of the author of our being.

It must be confessed, and every one finds it by experience, that there is in the human frame a sense of pain as well as pleasure, and equally to be attributed to the author of nature as its cause. They are both bodily and mental uneasinesses, set against enjoyments of each kind: from which it clearly follows indeed, that our present state is imperfect. But if we examine this appearance thoroughly, and consider the plain tendency and design of these opposite sensations, it is a direct proof of the divine beneficence in our constitution, rather than any just objection against it. For pleasure is the natural result of life, and of every one of its powers in their due operation. Pain arises only from such things as are hurtful to it; determining us to avoid them, or apply proper remedies. The uneasy sensations produced by external objects, and the distempered condition of the body, excite us to necessary care, and the use of means for our safety, much more effectually than our imperfect knowledge of things, and calm reason would do without them: and that inward remorse which accompanies evil actions, is the most powerful dissuasive from the repeated commission of them, and consequently to imperfect moral agents, (whose infirmity makes such a motive necessary,) it is a very strong one to the practice of virtue, which is their greatest happiness. And thus, I think, it plainly appears, that the constitution of the human nature, imperfect as it is, and not without a mixture of unhappiness, (probably holding the lowest rank in the rational and moral part of the creation,) yet carries in it the clearest marks of the Creator's bounty, and is a production of his power and wisdom, which at the same time fully proves him to be a benevolent, and a gracious Being.

There is yet another view of the human nature and condition, applicable to all its capacities and all its enjoyments, in which we may discern the plainest marks

marks of goodness on the part of its designing author and ruler. What I mean is (and no one can miss of observing it) that we grow up by degrees to the proper use of all our powers, and to the business and enjoyment of life, in the whole compass of it. Man at the commencement of his being, is a very weak unfinished creature; intended, but no way qualified, for important employments and a considerable figure in the world; unfurnished with knowledge and abilities of every sort for the province assigned him: and if experience did not convince us, one would not imagine that a new born infant could ever arrive at that measure of understanding, and that useful and delightful activity, in various ways, which we see grown men have actually attained to. But as the body with all its members, in due proportion, increases to a fitness for the part appointed to it, so the faculties of the mind are enlarged gradually; the understanding advances by slow steps to its maturity; and by it the objects are introduc'd, which excite our affections and occasion the exertion of our active powers, which become more vigorous by their exercise, acquiring habits attended with facility, promptness, and pleasure in acting. Our first essays, both in thinking and action, are so feeble and imperfect, as scarcely to discover the very being of the internal rational and active principles; and from so low beginnings, it is wonderful such progress should be made as we find in fact there is. But the progress is by imperceptible degrees, and every step of it really, though not sensibly, strengthens the faculty, and prepares it for farther improvements. And as the various powers of the human mind, the understanding, the memory, and the affections, jointly exert themselves in the finished scheme of life, they are during their progress mutually helpful to each other in preparation for it. When we arrive to a capacity of reflecting on the frame of our nature and its powers, with their ends and uses, we are then charged with the care of ourselves; so to cultivate

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cultivate our faculties and affections and to regulate their exercise, that the purposes of them may be obtained, and we may possess that happiness, which by a due culture they are naturally fitted to produce. And as thus it is evident, that in this important work a great deal depends on our prudence, diligence, and resolution; so our experience in the progress of life will convince us of the necessity, and furnish us with the occasions, of controuling our appetites and passions, (which is the most necessary part of self-discipline,) to qualify a man for behaving suitably to his condition, and enjoying all the advantages of it.

I have said that this is applicable to every capacity of the human nature, and every state of its existence. Consider man as a rational and social creature in this world; and in this view the various steps of his progress from infancy to manhood, (together with the changes of condition suitable to them,) prepare him gradually for the part he is to act here, and for the enjoyment which is appointed for him. Suppose a man brought into the world in a mature state, having all his faculties in as great perfection as ever they attain to; yet being wholly uninstructed in the affairs of life, and unpractised in its arts, utterly deficient in all that skill and self-government, which are acquired by habits, he must be very much at a loss how to conduct himself; even how to use with decency, and in due proportion, the organs of his body, and the powers of his mind; how to provide for his own subsistence; how to govern his natural propensions of all kinds; and under what restrictions to gratify them, and how to behave in society. And as this was actually the case of the first man, we must suppose that the gracious author of his being was his immediate instructor in the whole art of living; otherwise human life, (if it could have subsisted at all,) must have been at least for a long time, a rude, uncultivated, unharmonious, and uncomfortable thing. But now that a course of nature is established, That extraordinary method

method of instruction has ceased; and the want of it is supplied by the education we have, in our leisurely passage through the various periods of childhood and youth to complete manhood, (still under the tuition of kind providence,) whereby we are fitted for the offices, and enjoyments of a mature state. Thus it is also in the highest capacities of our nature, the intellectual and moral, considered abstractly from the use of them in the temporal life. The human mind is capable of great improvements in knowledge and virtue: but in the beginning of its existence, there are no appearances of either; no discoveries by their exercise, of rational and moral powers. While our sensitive faculties advance slowly to their appointed measure of perfection, the interior nobler powers which distinguish our species from other animals, begin to appear very weak and imperfect. By degrees however, the mind is opened to those sentiments; and its affections and active powers, by a vigorous attention and repeated acts, are formed into that character, and ripened into those confirmed habits, in which our true perfection and happiness consists. And for this the discipline of our present probationary state, where instruction is mixed with trial, is a good preparation.

Like this probably, in some measure, is the state of all finite free agents, in the beginning of their existence. There are deficiencies in knowledge and moral perfection, whereby there is naturally a possibility, and even a danger, of their falling into error and deviating from rectitude. Their escape from this danger, (which the good author of their being has put into the power of every such creature,) must be by the proper exercise of their own powers; by a careful attention, a resolved adherence to their duty, and the steady practice of virtue, which confirms good affections, and raises them to a security against temptations. But whatever the condition of superior natures may be, and however ignorant we are of the

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reasons which make it necessary that it should be thus progressive, we know that in fact this is the state of man; and we may with delightful gratitude observe in it the wisely conducted benignity of our Creator. What could be more worthy of perfect wisdom and goodness, than that such rational creatures, (probably the lowest order of them,) should not be brought into their largest sphere of action, till they were fitted for it by a preparatory discipline; nor raised to the highest happiness, till by the gradual enlargement of their faculties they should be qualified to enjoy it in the best manner? That they should be trained up by degrees to a meetness for their noblest employment, and principal felicity, which their full-grown faculties are by no means adapted to, without such an education? That every step of their progress should encrease their capacity; enable them more and more to contribute to their own perfection; the consciousness whereof is, and in such creatures, must be, a chief ingredient in their happiness? Thus God, agreeably to the ordinary methods of his operation in the course of nature, carries on this work of his, the noblest in this lower world, by a continued series of well-chosen means; and brings man by slow successive steps, to his finished form, a monument of his own goodness. And as we find it so in every capacity of our being, so we have reason to believe it will be thro' the whole of our existence. For since our highest powers are capable of improvements to which we cannot fix any limits, yet still infinitely distant from absolute perfection; every addition to our intellectual and moral attainments is a fresh manifestation of the divine unexhausted bounty; will increase our rational happiness, and furnish new matter of praise to its original author. And,

Lastly, (Still confining our inquiries concerning this subject to the points which we have the best means and opportunities of understanding,) let us consider men as in their present existence, under the

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care of, divine providence, and the general tenor of its dispensations towards them, and we shall find, that goodness and mercy follows them through the whole course of their lives. Man is not sent into the world to shift for himself, and to improve the powers of his nature, and the advantages of his condition, in the best manner he can for his own happiness, without the interposition of a superior power in his behalf. As God continually superintends the whole course of nature, by his own immediate agency, governing the affairs of the universe, the intire series of events in it, and all its various appearances; he particularly preserves, and constantly watches over all the nations of men, *whom he has made of one blood, to dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, with a tender compassionate care. His goodness, manifested in providing daily supplies for the numberless wants of the animal life, has been already observed: and not only does man partake of this in common with other living creatures, but it may be said to be, in some sense, peculiar to him; he being the principal, and all the other species by the appointment of providence, serving him with their labours, and their lives, as made for his sake. Must it not appear to the conviction of any attentive mind, that in all the generations of men which have been since the world began, God never left himself without a witness of his bounty, *in that he gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons*, whereby not only themselves were fed with the vegetable productions of the earth, but a multitude of animals, all in subjection and ministring to them in a variety of ways? As the devout psalmist observes, man has been cared for by his indulgent father, like a king in this low world. *Thou Lord, says he, hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and dignity. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; all sheep, and oxen, yea and the beasts of the fields, the*
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The argument has still a greater force, if we consider the moral state of mankind. Instead of approving themselves to God by a proper use of their rational faculties in pursuing the true ends of their being, they are greatly degenerated, all flesh have corrupted their ways, fallen *short of the glory of God*, and by a multitude of transgressions rendered themselves obnoxious to his displeasure. This consideration sets his goodness towards them in the most amiable light, heightening it into tender pity and long-suffering patience. Nothing is more apparently essential to the character of the supreme governor of the world, than perfect holiness; he loves righteousness and hates iniquity. As every man's own conscience approving the righteous laws of his nature, is a witness to the moral rectitude of the great Lawgiver, and leads him to the expectation of his just judgment, or impartial distribution of rewards and punishments; so the remarkable interposál of divine providence in the affairs of the world, by inflicting severe judgments for the heinous wickedness of men obstinately persisted in, has been universally acknowledged; and desolating strokes, such especially as were sudden and surprising, not expected according to the ordinary course of nature, (as *when the foundation of the wicked*, nay, the whole world of the ungodly was overthrown with a preternatural flood; *Sodom and Gomorrah* were destroyed by a fire from heaven;) such strokes have been always attributed to the immediate avenging hand of God, as a signification to men, even in their state of trial, of his general design at last finally to condemn impenitent sinners, when the righteous shall be saved; of which great distinguishing judgment, there were eminent examples set forth in the deliverance of *Noah* from the flood, and of *Lot* from the destruction of *Sodom*. These signal surprising desolations, I say, have been

universally attributed to the immediate hand of God: the other catastrophes of nations and cities which had not such miraculous appearances, have been accounted for by the wisest of men in the same manner, when (which upon a careful Observation will appear to have been generally the case in fact) they followed a long course of obstinate and irreclaimable iniquity. But these interpositions are extraordinary, and evidently intended as examples for the reformation of sinners, and that *by the judgments of God which are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness*; which is their greatest good, and the only sure foundation of their happiness. The general administration of providence is different. The gentle methods of mercy and loving-kindness are always first used to lead men to repentance. They never have reason to complain, that they are surprised with destroying vengeance, in the beginning of their departure from the paths of virtue; or indeed that it overtakes them, till after many repeated provocations, and till by their incorrigible perverseness and the impenitency of their hearts they have treasured wrath to themselves. The Instances recorded in scripture which I have referred to, of God's righteous severity against heinous offenders, do also afford us remarkable examples of his patience. When God had resolved to destroy the world with a flood, yet † St. Peter observes, that *his long-suffering waited while the ark was preparing*, during which time Noah was a preacher of righteousness to them, to try if they could possibly be reclaimed, and that ruin prevented. And before the overthrow of Sodom, just Lot was sent to be a teacher and an example of virtue there, *whose righteous soul was long vexed with their unlawful deeds*; while God continued such a warning to them, unwilling that they should perish; and at last represented himself as ready to spare the city, if there were found in it but ten righteous persons. To-

† 1 Pet. iii. 20.

wards the generality of mankind, and in the ordinary course of things, lenity is so apparently the character of the divine government, the instances of its severity so very rare, and punishment so long delayed, that this is often abused by sinners to the encouraging and hardening themselves in their wicked courses; *and because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil* †.

And now to conclude, If upon the whole it appears by the best judgment we can make of the works of God which are known to us; by the frame of inanimate nature, and the constant providential direction of its course, as related to living creatures; by the animal constitution fitted for various kinds of enjoyment, and liberally supplied with the means of it; especially the constitution of the human nature, indued with noble powers and affections, in the proper exercise of which it is capable of attaining to a high degree of perfection and felicity; and by the conduct of divine providence towards mankind, continually heaping favours upon them notwithstanding their sins, and exercising all the forbearance and indulgence to them which can consist with a regard to righteousness and virtue, (the promoting whereof through the whole creation in his uniform design, most worthy of perfect goodness;) if, I say, it appears by the best judgment we can make upon a survey of these the works and ways of God, all of them which fall under our observation, that the universal tendency is to happiness, and therefore the universal intention seeing the cause is perfectly wise; various happiness, according to the various capacities of the beings it is designed for;---must we not conclude, that he is a kind and benevolent being, *that the Lord is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*.

† Eccles. viii. 11.

DISCOURSE VIII.

The principal Objections against the Goodness of GOD answered.

[ABERNETHY.]

MARK x. 18.

There is none good but one, that is God.

AS there is no principle of greater necessity and importance in religion than the *goodness* of God, (indeed without it religion cannot subsist,) there is none of which we have more clear and satisfying evidence. Universal nature proclaims it; and wherever eternal Power and God-head are manifested, there also goodness is seen, *being understood by the things that are made.* The inanimate part of the creation, itself incapable of any enjoyment, is so framed and governed as to have a visible relation to life, and to be subservient to its preservation and happiness. The animals of the earth are continually cared for by bountiful providence; and especially man, considered in the whole compass of his being, is a monument of his Creator's beneficence.

But there is an objection against this doctrine taken from the *evil* which there is in the world. This very world which is represented as such a theatre of the divine goodness, and particularly the state of mankind, seems on the contrary to contain so much

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evil of various kinds, that some have been extremely shocked by it. If the supreme ruler, whose power is irresistible and his knowledge unlimited, be perfectly good, and he designed the happiness of his creatures,---How shall the many calamities which men feel themselves perpetually subjected to, and deeply affected with, be accounted for? Whence comes sickness and pains, poverty and distress, famine and pestilence, wars and desolations? And if these miseries are alledged to be the natural or penal consequences of moral evil, how shall the permission of that moral evil be explained?

This difficulty has appeared so great, as to give occasion to a scheme of principles directly opposite to those which we have endeavoured to establish, I mean that which is commonly called the *Manichean* system, (first, 'tis probable, vented among the *Persian Magi*, afterwards embraced by some professed Christians,) concerning two *independent* principles in the universe, the one good the *father of lights*, from whom good of every kind is derived as from its proper author and cause; the other an eternal, necessary, and self-originated principle of *evil*, to whom, as its true cause, must be attributed all the evil, both natural and moral, which is in the world. It may be observed, that this opinion, absurd as it is, professes a respect to the article we are now considering, the goodness of God, being not avowedly levelled against it; the evidence of it is, it seems, so glaring, that none of mankind who acknowledge a deity pretend to deny it; but is levelled against his omnipotence, his independence, and absolute supremacy. But as the proof of these perfections and glories of the supreme being is too strong to be shaken by any pretence whatsoever, so the *Manichean* error, whatever it pretends, really subverts the doctrine of God's goodness itself so far as it is the foundation of religion; and defeats the most essential pious affections which arise from it, by destroying confidence in God, from whose do-

minion, according to that scheme, evil is exempted; and we can have no hope of escaping it by his insufficient power; and it corrupts the true notion of moral evil, leading us to understand it, not as the voluntary, and therefore culpable act of a free agent, but as derived from an independent necessity of nature.

The principle of two *co-ordinate* and *independent* powers the causes of all things, or of two *Deities*, is unsupported by any pretence of proof; a merely arbitrary hypothesis, invented to salve the appearance of evil, of which however it gives no satisfying account. I have endeavoured on another occasion to prove the unity of God, by shewing *unity of design* in the frame and course of nature, or in the constitution and government of the inanimate, the sensitive, the intellectual, and moral world; and all the arguments insisted on for that purpose conclude still more strongly when applied to the present subject; that is, they demonstrate that there are not, nor can possibly be, two intelligent beings absolutely supreme and unmade, the makers and rulers of the world, of directly opposite characters, the one perfectly good, from whom all happiness and every thing truly worthy and valuable proceeds; the other malicious, always intending, and always producing all the misery and wickedness he can. Must it not appear to any plain understanding extremely absurd, that there should be a constant harmony in the effects when there is not only a diversity, but a stated irreconcilable contrariety in the counsels, the interests, and intire characters of the intelligent causes? That two agents, whose designs continually thwart each other, and their dispositions are as inconsistent as light and darkness, should join together to form and carry on a vast system which comprehends an almost infinite variety of parts, yet without any marks of disagreement, but, on the contrary, the order of their works is preserved, and the obvious

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obvious ends of them uniformly pursued? That there should be a malevolent, self-originated, and independent being, active and intelligent, ever prone to mischief, and exerting his utmost power in the production of it; and yet in the whole extent of nature, as far as we can discern, not one monument of his true character to be seen; not one finished piece or system which by its constitution and the law of its nature tends to, and ultimately terminates in misery; but every living thing, capable of pleasure and pain, that we know, is so framed, that its natural state is a state of such happiness as is suitable to its condition of being?

The truth is, when one looks attentively into the *Manichean* scheme, it appears so full of gross absurdities, so destitute of rational evidence, nay utterly inconsistent with the most obvious *Phænomena* of the world, as scarcely in the judgment of any reasonable man to want a refutation. But the appearance, which gave rise to it, deserves to be seriously inquired into as an objection against the divine goodness. In this view therefore I shall consider it, in the present discourse; and if we can get fairly rid of the difficulty, and a rational account can be given of the origin of evil, without having recourse to two independent principles, the foundations of religion upon the foot of one sole supreme monarch of the universe, will be still more firmly established.

To begin with that part of the objection which relates to natural evil, or unhappiness, such as sickness, and pain, and death: Here we acknowledge all that can be demanded, namely, that not only this is permitted by the Deity, but that his providence is the cause of it as well as of other appearances in the world. He is intimately present with all his creatures, continually superintending all their affairs, exercising his power and wisdom in the preservation and government of them: He makes them to be what they are, guides their motions and tendencies,

and by his own agency effects the alterations which are in their state. He is particularly the author of life; it is sustained by him, and all its enjoyments are derived from his bounty. *In him we live and move and have being.* It would be unreasonable then, not to attribute to him the appointed changes in our condition, and to alledge that he gives joy, but not grief; health, but not sickness, and that he is the author of life, but not of death; seeing events of one kind as naturally fall out in the usual course of things as the other, and if there be one government of the world, must be equally under its direction. The scripture, which so fully asserts the goodness of God, (representing it as an essential perfection of his nature, and manifested by his diffusing its beneficial fruits over the whole creation, and opening his hand liberally to satisfy every living thing,) yet at the same time declares very expressly, that natural evil is his creature as well as good, and that the sufferings of sensitive and intelligent beings proceed from him as truly as their happiness. Thus one of the prophets, in the name of God says, * *I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.* Another, † *Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* In the 104th Psalm, where the argument of the divine beneficence is designedly treated, and the plenitude of its manifestations in all parts of the terraqueous globe, yet it is said, ‡ *he hides his face, and living creatures are troubled; he takes away their breath, and they die and return to their dust.* And to add no more, Moses fully asserts the supreme dominion and power of almighty God as exercised in destroying life, and in wounding as well as healing,---|| *See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.*

* Isaiah xlv. 7. † Amos iii. 6. ‡ Ver. 28. || Deut. xxxii. 39.

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Now the question is, whether all this, (which we have acknowledged as certainly true in fact,) is inconsistent with the goodness of God? Here the proof seems fairly to lie on the objector; for positive evidence has been brought on the other side, which we think clear and convincing. If then an appearance is alledged to be inconsistent, it is most reasonably required that the inconsistency should be shewn. But this is never to be done, if we take into consideration all that is necessary in order to our making a true and certain judgment. Indeed if the point were to be determined by the first report of sense, we should be apt to pronounce every kind and degree of pain or uneasiness *evil*, and the designing author of it *unkind*. But experience has taught all men that have common sense, to judge otherwise. For nothing is more obvious, even within the narrow compass of our own affairs in the present state, than that many things which at first seemed to be grievous, upon a more thorough consideration of the effects they produce, and their remote consequences, are found to be salutary, and those which have the flattering appearance of pleasant or good, prove in the issue destructive: some things, for instance, which are very pernicious to life, and on that account must rather be judged evil; as on the other hand very unpleasant medicines, or painful operations, being the means of health, are called good. And, with respect to societies, (in which public and private interests frequently interfere,) he is a good governor who promotes the former at the expence of the latter, who by the sufferings of individuals, when it cannot otherwise be done, provides for the peace and safety of a whole community. It is therefore necessary, in order to judge what is absolutely ill or good for a particular being, that we should know all its interests, and the whole of its existence; and to judge what is good or ill for a system, we should have a thorough comprehension of all its parts, with their

their relations and dependencies, and the last result of all events concerning it. But with respect to individuals of mankind, and much more with respect to the whole rational creation, these are points quite above the reach of human understanding. Who can take upon him to say that an event is altogether bad, and was so intended by the directing cause, who does not know the connection it has with other events past and future, which if it were known, might shew it to be inseparable from a scheme *in the whole* most worthy of perfect wisdom and benevolence. And thus we see that the strength of the objection against the divine goodness taken from the appearances of ill or misery in this world, which has been represented as so formidable, rests wholly on the imperfection of our knowledge, which can never be a just foundation to reason upon, in the very points whereof we are ignorant. If it is proved by a multitude of instances which cannot be otherwise accounted for, that God is beneficent, and the contrary is supported only by bare appearances, which, when examined, we are sure may be consistent with goodness, nay the genuine fruits of it, and our experience leads us to believe it, at least probable, that they are really so, let any attentive impartial mind judge what the true conclusion is, and whether the evidence of the doctrine we are now considering, does not remain unshaken.

But though what has been said is a sufficient answer to the objection, we may proceed to farther considerations, which strongly evince that all the imperfection and unhappiness we see in the world is consistent with the goodness of God, its maker and ruler. First, it can never be alledged with any pretence of reason, that the goodness of the Creator required all his creatures should be of one order, and equal in the degree of their perfections and happiness. That were to set limits to omnipotence and infinite wisdom, both which are gloriously manifested in a diversity of productions. Now if it was fit and becoming the wisdom

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wisdom of the Deity, to diversify the manifestations of his power by creating essentially distinct natures, with different capacities or different kinds and degrees of perfection, it necessarily follows, that the exercise of his goodness must be various, as suited to the condition of the beings which are its objects. How the glorious principle of divine benevolence displays itself in other parts of the universe and towards superior orders of creatures, does not fall within our observation; but we see, that in this lower world there is not only a vast multitude of individual animals, but of different kinds; which shews the wise œconomy of providence, and gives such a multiform appearance to its bounty, as must raise in attentive minds a very high admiration of it, instead of being any reasonable objection against it. Shall we say that God is not good to all his creatures, because he has not made them all equal? or that the brutal kinds have no share in his bounty, because they are not moral agents? or, that mankind owe him no thanks, because they are in a mixt imperfect state? On the contrary, is it not rather to be acknowledged, that his goodness is the more conspicuous, by this variety; and that, by their different enjoyment derived from him, the creatures proclaim the riches of his beneficence, as well as the largeness of his understanding? There is therefore no ground of objection against the divine goodness from the natural imperfection of some created beings, from their inferior condition, and the lower kinds and degrees of enjoyment which are appointed for them.

But farther, It may be alledged, nay I am willing that the strength of the whole cause should be singly rested upon it, that goodness not only allowed, it *required*, that there should be different degrees of perfection and happiness among the creatures of God. This will be evident as soon as we reflect that a scheme of *perfect equality* must of necessity exclude all participation of that part of the divine blessedness, *the communication*

munication of good. For where the same kind, and the same degree of happiness, is at all times possessed by all, there it is manifest, beneficence can have no place; being from the *nature* of such a state, in every instance, plainly impracticable. After saying this, I am something afraid, that the generous human heart can hardly have patience while I am going through with the argument. Indeed this kind of happiness which the objection has found out as the most perfect, and therefore fittest for the creatures of God, is the very same, and can be no other, than that indolent, unaffectionate, and altogether selfish enjoyment of existence, which the *Epicureans*, in high compliment, reserved for the Gods *themselves*. And so far these philosophers had certainly the advantage, that allowing this state of pompous ease to be fullest of felicity, it was but fitting and decent it should be ascribed to the Gods; and in consequence of it, that goodness being an active principle, incompatible with such divine repose, should be deemed unworthy of so delicate an habitation as the breast of such Deities. Wretched however at philosophising! where beneficence is in conclusion required to be exterminated as an enemy to happiness. But let it be remembered that what lies at present before us, is not to give any direct proof that God is good. The evidence for this most important article of theism has been already produced: but it is only to shew, that the fact of subordination, and diversity in the degree of happiness, (which we see and know actually to take place in God's creation,) is so far from having any tendency to make void the former reasoning on that subject, that allowing that reasoning to be just, and that goodness is in truth an attribute of the Deity, it unavoidably follows, that there must have been instituted such a subordination. Can any thing be more plain, than if goodness be essential, (and if it be an attribute at all, it must be essential,) to the divine perfection and felicity, and be in its own nature communicable, that it must likewise be essential to the highest perfection and happiness that God can communicate:

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and consequently, that seeing goodness determines him to confer the highest possible happiness, goodness itself must be the cause of this subordination; without which this noblest, and truly divine perfection and felicity, could not have found any place in the whole circle of dependent being; not one creature that could be the object of another's beneficence. This is not the place for pursuing this argument unto all its consequences; but from what has been already said, the attentive mind will be naturally led to infer, that the same cause that required a subordination at all, may be justly supposed to require, that this subordination should be continued down through a vast variety of orders, so long as happiness was preserved superior in degree to imperfection; or in other words, so long as existence can be pronounced a blessing, or preferable to that, which if it can be wished, is the most unnatural of all conceivable wishes, *annihilation*, or *not to be*. Observe here, a most pleasing instance of that perfect harmony and connection, that will always be found to subsist between the true principles of theism, and the reality or truth of things: an appearance which has often been talked of as a most shocking objection against the goodness of God, turns out upon a more attentive examination, to be the natural and inseparable consequence and effect of this very goodness.

2dly, As natural good and evil, or happiness and misery, are of various kinds and degrees; and experience shews, that some of these opposite kinds and degrees may be mixt together in one state, the condition of any being is to be denominated from the prevalence of either; and consequently the disposition of the agent, by whose appointment that condition is determined. Every state is to be acknowledged good, and the author of it benevolent, in which good prevails, though not without a mixture of evil; and which therefore is better than non-existence. Now this is so evidently the case of living creatures during the continuance of their being, that the objection against the divine goodness, taken from the imperfection of their

their enjoyments and their liableness to pain, is fully removed by it. And for the difficulty arising from the shortness of their duration, it is answered upon the same grounds. For how unreasonable were it to allege that God is not good in giving life, because he intends to take it away? That a favour freely bestowed by him is not worthy to be acknowledged, because at a time appointed by his wisdom it is to be recalled? Or because an inferior life is shortened for the sake of a more important one, and by the wise administration of providence serves higher, more useful, and beneficial purposes, than merely its own enjoyment? Especially it is to be considered, that the short-lived animals, which as far as we know, are not destined to a future existence, give no discovery of their having any painful desires of it, or any anxiety about death, which may interrupt such present pleasures as they are capable of.

3dly, As the state of man is what most immediately affects us, what we are best acquainted with, and concerning which we are the most capable of making a judgment, we may observe, that when the natural good and evil which we see and feel in it are compared together, and a just estimate made of the whole, it will appear that the former is the superior end of the divine administration, which therefore ought to be denominated beneficent from its principal and ultimate view. I observed before, that both in the animal and moral part of the human constitution, pains are salutary, and were by the gracious intending cause designed as means of safety and happiness. But it is farther most worthy of our serious consideration, that through the whole condition of being in this world, as under the government of almighty God, the same end, *our greatest good*, is uniformly pursued, by the discipline of his providence, in our afflictions. I take for granted, what every wise man will agree to, that virtue is the greatest good, the highest perfection and happiness of the human nature.

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ture. Whatever therefore has a tendency to promote *that*, is for our good; and may be attributed not to a malevolent design, but rather to the appointment of a gracious and compassionate father. Now experience shews, that such is our present infirmity, and we are liable to so many temptations of various kinds, especially in a prosperous and easy state of outward things, which affords the plentiful means of a free indulgence in the gratification of our lower appetites and passions, that very few of mankind maintain their virtuous integrity uninterrupted, and escape *the corruption that is in the world through lust*. At least it may be said of all universally, even of the best, that they are in danger of being misled from the paths of righteousness, and neglecting its superior pleasures, in a constant series of flowing worldly enjoyments. Therefore are divine corrections profitable to them; and pains, sickness, and distresses of various sorts wisely dispensed by providence, tending to abate their relish of inferior gratifications, put the mind on pursuing the more noble and solid satisfaction which arises from the practice of virtue.

Besides; Adversity is not only the means of instruction to men of amending their tempers and reforming their lives, as it brings them to calm reflection, and sensibly convinces them that the pleasures of the animal life are uncertain, in comparison low, and unworthy of their eager pursuit; it is also the immediate occasion of the best exercises, and the highest moral improvements which the mind is capable of. Equanimity in all the changes of our outward condition; patience under sufferings of divers kinds and of a long continuance; resignation to the will of the supreme, perfectly wise, righteous and good governor of the world, and an unshaken confidence in him; with a benevolent disposition towards all mankind, even the most injurious; and a hearty persevering zeal for the publick good, notwithstanding many disappointments and continued ill usage;—These will appear

appear to our thoughts, in speculation itself, the most lovely parts of a beautiful moral character : But the heart that is conscious of having practised them, has arrived to the very top of self-enjoyment, and possesses the highest felicity which the human soul in its present state can possibly attain to. Persecution or suffering for the cause of truth and virtue, which has sometimes happened to good men, seems to furnish a plausible argument against the equity and goodness of the divine government. But upon a thorough examination, we shall be satisfied that it is consistent, not only with perfect righteousness, but God's most tender and compassionate care for his faithful servants. Virtue is far from being the less in their esteem, or yielding them the less satisfaction of mind, because they suffer for it : On the contrary, it is much endeared, and a greater confidence and security arises from it. For true goodness then appears in all its dignity and beauty, trampling over every thing that comes in competition with it ; and it is impossible for the sincere, self-approving mind, to think that its cause, and the condition of its friends, however oppressed at present, can be always unhappy.

Again : The afflictions of some, especially of the virtuous, may be very useful to others, and the means of great public good. It has been already observed, that extraordinary punishments inflicted on sinners are graciously intended by providence as public warnings to the rest of mankind, that they may avoid the crimes against which the divine vengeance has been so signally testified. But the sufferings of the most innocent and righteous, however grievous they may be for the present, are sometimes also the occasions of their being more extensively useful than otherwise they could have been. Of this the history of *Joseph* affords us a very remarkable instance. That good man, cruelly persecuted in his father's family, having narrowly escaped the snare which his envious brethren laid for his life, was sold by them to a servitude which they (with great

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probability) thought would be perpetual and very wretched. But the wise providence of God so directed the event, that it proved not only the occasion of great prosperity to himself, but of preserving his own kindred, and indeed a great multitude of mankind who were otherwise in danger of perishing by a destructive famine. And he makes this wise and pious reflection himself on the whole amazing scene, that though his brethren had designed evil against him, yet *God meant it for good, to save much people alive*; which to a person of his humanity and goodness, did more than compensate all his sufferings. Though this instance is indeed extraordinary, and it is not to be expected that the issue of good men's afflictions will be generally parallel to it, yet it is very instructive, as shewing that however frightful and shocking the first appearances of sufferings may be, and however wicked the intentions of those who are the instruments of them, they are under the disposal of a wise and good providence, which knows how to bring good out of evil. But the principal, and the most ordinary way whereby the sufferings of the righteous are publicly useful, is by setting their virtues in a clear and strong light as examples. Integrity never shines with so bright a lustre, nor appears so amiable, as in a great trial of affliction. To see a man struggling with difficulties, to which, one would think, human strength is utterly unequal, oppressed with reproaches and injuries of all kinds, with a train of vexatious disappointments, with tormenting pains, and continually exposed to the very last extremities of suffering, yet still possessing his soul in patience, maintaining an undisturbed equanimity, and resolutely adhering to the cause of truth, and to his duty, by deserting which he might deliver himself out of all his troubles,—This is certainly the noblest testimony that can be given to virtue, and must leave a conviction of its excellence on every mind which is witness to it, and not stupidly insensible, or irreclaimably hardened, in a wicked course. How often have

persecutors themselves relented, (not to mention spectators,) and even been won to the love of goodness by glorious examples of invincible fortitude, patience, and meekness in the distressed; and feeble irresolute minds, otherwise in danger of being led away with the errors of the wicked, been animated to a courageous and persevering steadfastness in well doing? 'Tis true, that even in ordinary life, example has very great force: Perhaps nothing has contributed more to preserve the reputation of virtue, and to propagate it among mankind, than their seeing all excuses and objections against the practice of it effectually refuted by the unaffected piety, the hardy temperance, the inflexible justice, and diffusive charity of frail mortals like themselves, who have the same infirmity of nature, and the same temptations to the contrary vices. But still exemplary virtue shines more illustriously under trials: And as then the strength of good dispositions appears the greater, it must proportionably have the more powerful influence on others. Surely a good man will think all the adversities of his life amply recompensed, when they not only produce fruits so advantageous to himself, and are the means of his growing in virtue, but are so beneficial to mankind, tending to reclaim them from their pernicious ways, and to restore true piety and goodness among them. Who can deny that providence is beneficial to the human race, which makes the tolerable sufferings of a few individuals (therefore tolerable, because even during their incumbency, they are accompanied with pleasures of a superior kind) and sufferings of a short continuance, as the Apostle speaks, *light and for a moment*; become so eminently useful, by serving those glorious ends which are worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness?

The sum of our answer upon the whole to this part of the argument is, That not only the appearances of natural evil or unhappiness, in the present state of things, cannot be justly objected against the goodness

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goodness of the divine government, because they are not prevalent: on the contrary, every considerate person must be convinced there is more happiness than misery in the world; that all kinds of life in their natural state have enjoyment annexed to them, and pain only added as a means of their preservation; that happiness is the governing view in the human constitution; and the dispensations of providence towards men, in the general course and design of them, are for good; those, which for the present seem to be most grievous often tending to the greatest good. But farther, if some of these appearances were more difficult to be explained than they are, so that we could not see or conjecture any good to which they do or may tend, yet we could not reasonably pronounce them to be absolutely evil, and in the whole; experience in a multitude of instances teaching us, that good and evil of this sort are connected together, so as to be changed into each other. Now, if we take the whole series of events in the world as under one wise and good direction, and comprehended in the scheme of the divine providential administration, and if we allow what is so apparently reasonable, that one would think it cannot be denied, that nothing can be justly called evil, which in the event produces greater good whereby it is over-ballanced;---If I say, we allow this, who can have sufficient reason to assert that any event is absolutely evil, since it is impossible for the human understanding to comprehend all the relations and the remote issues of things? That which in our narrow way of thinking may seem the worst that could happen, may yet in the intire plan of the divine councils be necessary, and produce the best effects. God has given us such rules of action, and such notices of things, as are best accommodated to our condition of being, and the fittest to direct us so as we may answer its purposes; but he has not let us into the secret of his own designs, which are so

complicated, and of so vast a compass, that our minds are utterly unable to comprehend them. This however we may safely rest in, that if the supreme governing mind perfectly knows all things, past, present, and to come, with all their connexions and dependencies; if the order of the world, and the harmony of things, shews him to be wise; and prevailing good in it is a convincing proof of his benevolence, then all things, being under the direction of a wise and good Agent, are ordered for the best; and the contrary appearances, are no just objections against this, seeing they are no more than *appearances*, amounting to no certain proof of absolute evil in the whole, but only of the defectiveness of our understandings. Nay, we may conclude, that the whole progressive scheme of nature and providence, comprehending all creatures, and the entire series of events which ever have been or shall be, is absolutely the best, and productive of the greatest happiness that could possibly be. For happiness being the proper object and end of benevolence, when this is accompanied in the agent with omnipotence and infinite knowledge, the greatest happiness in the whole, must be the intention and the effect. Is it not a contradiction to suppose, that a benevolent being would choose to execute a scheme which he saw would produce a lesser measure of good, when another which he saw would produce a *greater*, was at the same time present to his mind, and equally in his power to accomplish?

But there is another kind of evil, to which and the consequences of it, the difficulty also relates, that is *moral evil*. Of this it cannot be said that God is the author, or that he does at all approve it; but yet upon the principle of his sole universal dominion, we must conclude, it was in some sense permitted by his providence, and that it was foreseen by him without his intending to prevent it, which he could have done. Nay, the most important mea-

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tures of his conduct towards mankind, all known to him from the beginning, were formed upon the supposition of its being. Now the question is, how such a permission can consist with the moral perfections of the Deity? It is to be thought, that a being infinitely holy, and utterly averse to all moral turpitude, would not use his power to prevent it? That a being infinitely good, would leave his creatures unsupported against temptations to crimes which are ruinous both to themselves and others, which fully the beauty of his own works, and tend to defeat the design of them; nay, that he would place his creatures, frail and fallible, in circumstances wherein he foresaw they would fall from their innocence, and involve themselves in misery to be inflicted as a punishment by his own avenging hand?

The answer usually given, and which, when fully and impartially considered, seems in a great measure to take off the force of the argument, is, that moral evil is wholly to be imputed to the creatures themselves who commit it; that it proceeds from an abuse of their liberty, or free agency, which is a high privilege of their nature, worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God to give to such creatures, most suitable to their condition of being, absolutely necessary to virtue itself, and to the happiness that arises from it, which is the greatest happiness they are capable of. It is not to be imagined, (which yet the objection necessarily supposes,) that the goodness of God, or his rectitude, require the exertion of his utmost power for preventing evil. His attributes are exercised in a perfect harmony; and he never does, (it may be said in some sense, he cannot do,) any thing, but what is agreeable to them all. His power, which cannot possibly be controuled by any opposite strength or resistance, is always, and must be directed in its exercise by wisdom; and it is not an indignity to his absolute omnipotence, to say, he cannot do any thing but what is fit and reasonable

to be done. In like manner, holiness and goodness are to be considered as perfections, or principles in the divine nature, which exert themselves, not necessarily, but freely; or which do not require all to be done, in every instance, which can possibly be done by absolute omnipotence, in order to accomplish their ends, or attain what they incline to. In this, as in other cases, the wisdom of God requires that his operation should be according to the order which he has established, and to the nature of things which he has wisely framed to be preserved inviolable. As in the government of the inanimate creatures, he acts *suitably* to their natures, moving and disposing of them by the irresistible determination of his sovereign will, so his influence on moral agents is such as does not destroy the essential powers which he has given them. Let it be more particularly considered, first, that perhaps there is not, nor can be, any being of a limited understanding, above the possibility of being misled in its moral conduct; and all the orders of created free agents must naturally be in a state of trial, till by a right use of liberty their integrity is confirmed. If it be so, it does not necessarily follow from the nature of liberty itself; nor is it a contradiction, that rectitude should be immutable, for the divine rectitude certainly is so; but it arises from the natural imperfection of finite minds, and the fixed order of the divine operation on created things, in a congruity to their several natures.

Every imperfect agent, having a variety in his frame, must have propensions to particular objects which are adapted to the indigence of his condition; which propensions, in a regular moral constitution, are under the government of conscience, but their being does not depend upon it. They are excited by the presence of their suitable objects, or perhaps without it; and though their first motions, and perhaps their continuance in the mind for some time,

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may be innocent, yet it is easily conceivable that they may demand a gratification, in circumstances and degrees, which conscience forbids. Here then is a tendency or a temptation to evil, from which the creature by the right use of its own powers may escape, and thereby be more confirmed in virtue; but a possibility of falling and corrupting itself, seems to be inseparable from every finite nature; and even the danger of it seems naturally to attend the state of all finite moral agents, during some part of their existence. However that be, we know that we are possessed of such a liberty, that we are capable both of doing right and wrong; and our moral powers so constituted, with such a freedom, we cannot help thinking a very high privilege; whereby we are raised above the condition of many other beings, and have the essential foundation of noble enjoyments. Secondly, The human mind necessarily appears to itself the cause both of the moral good and evil which is done by it. When our hearts reproach us for doing wrong, we are conscious of no constraint, but that it was our own choice; and we were furnished with all the defences against it which we could expect or desire as free agents, and which might have been effectual, if we had carefully used them, and duly exercised our reason. When our consciences approve us for having done right, we are sensible that we acted with equal freedom, which is the very ground of inward satisfaction; and that no power is wanting to that moral integrity which yields true self-enjoyment. The mind therefore, I say, appears to itself the cause both of good and evil. The capacity is derived wholly from God, and is preserved by him; the particular determination is wholly from ourselves; only influenced, so far as is consistent with our free agency, by setting before us sufficient motives to good: yet the mind has a natural power of making a wrong choice. We must then be condemned by our own hearts, in charging

the human constitution as defective to the purposes of virtue, and thereby of happiness, and impeaching the goodness of its author; since we are conscious to ourselves, that we are furnished with all which is necessary, and know of no power that is wanting to our doing good and eschewing evil.

Thirdly, Whereas it is alledged, that since God foresaw men would abuse their liberty; that they would pervert that which is right, and thereby make themselves unhappy; goodness seems to have required, that the occasion of such an abuse should have been prevented. The answer, so far as relates to the divine prescience, is, that it has no manner of influence on future events, nor does at all affect the nature or the being of them. It ought not to be said that things are future, or certainly will come to pass, because they are foreknown, but they are foreknown because they are future. Events to come, as well as those which are present, or past, are known to God, just as they are in themselves, and in their intire causes. The whole series of necessary causes and effects is seen by his perfect understanding from the beginning to the end. What he has determined to do by his own power is foreknown, as ascertained by that determination. But the transgressions of his creatures, of which themselves are the sole causes, appear quite otherwise: they are the actions of free agents, the futurity of which is no more determined by his appointment, than the actual production of them is effected by his power. As the bare knowledge of crimes present, or past, does not communicate the least degree of their guilt, but may consist with a perfect abhorrence of them, and the tenderest compassion for the offender, so may the fore-knowledge of them when future, unless something be omitted by the prescient being which was necessary for preventing them, and which was not only in his power, but fit and reasonable for him to do.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, It must be acknowledged that, strictly speaking, it was in God's power to have prevented moral evil altogether. If a finite intelligent being cannot be absolutely impeccable, yet he certainly could have created moral agents much more perfect than men are; given them a greater measure of knowledge; set the motives of virtue in so strong a light before them, as more effectually to secure their attachment to it; and he could have placed them in a state much more free from temptations, and consequently in less danger of making defection. Nay, as liberty itself is the gift of God, depending wholly on his pleasure, he could have prevented the abuse of it by with-holding it altogether, if nothing else was sufficient, or he could have prevented the conjuncture of circumstances in which he foresaw liberty could be abused. But the question is, whether goodness and wisdom required that such methods should be taken; or rather, if upon the narrow view we have of the works of God and the whole system of the universe, we can pretend to judge that the present constitution, in this branch of it which relates to free agents, is inconsistent with the wisdom and moral perfections of the supreme Being? Shall we take upon us to say, that the order of the creation, and the ends for which it was made, did not require, or even allow that there should be such a rank of beings in it, constituted as we are, with understanding, liberty, and moral affections, but capable of sin, tempted to it, and thereby in danger of becoming unhappy through their own fault? If we suppose one in a superior condition of being, having an understanding vastly more enlarged than the human, and a more extensive view of the universal system, which comprehends many orders of created intelligences with various degrees of perfection and enjoyment, can we pretend to affirm that it would appear to that mind incongruous in nature, that there should be such a species of rational creatures as mankind, with all the

appointed weakness and imperfection of their present state; or even that it would not appear a very proper part of the divine plan, necessary to the beauty and harmony of the whole, variously related to the rest, and forming a scene wherein the perfections of the Deity are admirably displayed, and where good is the true character of the intire scheme? But though such a supposition is reasonable, and shews that our understandings are too weak, and our knowledge too scanty to comprehend this subject; consequently, with how little judgment men take upon them to censure the works of God, of which they know so little; we may consider the human constitution, and our whole state of being in this world, with all the advantages and disadvantages of it, in a way more accommodated to our capacity: that is, we may consider it by itself, abstractly from its relation to the rest of the universe; and even in that view, it will appear no uneligible thing, and that the good in it over-balances the inconveniency which arises from the danger that attends liberty. Would not one who considers the privileges of our nature, and the various enjoyment which belongs to the general condition of men, together with that measure of perfection and felicity which we have in prospect, if we duly use our own powers, and improve our opportunities, even though it be accompanied with the hazard of moral evil and unhappiness, (which is only to be incurred by our own fault but may be avoided if we are not wanting to ourselves, and we may reasonably hope, from the goodness of God, for all necessary assistance in order to it;) would not, I say, one think this state in the whole, preferable to non-existence? And if it appears to us preferable, then it is to be acknowledged good, to the praise of the author's benevolence, notwithstanding its frailty and mutability; and although, in the event, it could not reasonably be expected, but that some of

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such an order of beings would fall into sin and unhappiness.

What has been said on this subject is agreeable to the explications given by the most eminent ancient philosophers of the origin of evil. They attributed it, not to an independent evil agent, nor to *unqualified matter*, (into which some had absurdly enough resolved moral defects themselves,) but to what they called the *necessity of imperfect beings*: Meaning, that as all creatures must necessarily have some degree of imperfection; particularly, the necessary imperfection of created free agents implies that they may possibly err, and act contrary to right, so the placing them in such a possibility is by no means to be imputed to any deficiency of wisdom and goodness in God, but is the inevitable result of their nature and condition of being; so that if they should exist at all constituted as they are, it must be in their power to do wrong. For example, such a creature as man, compounded of flesh and spirit, must have a variety of affections; some higher, and some lower; some which determine him to pursue the proper perfection of his superior faculties as the chief end of his being, and others which attach him to the inferior part of his constitution, which must also be preserved by his care, during the time appointed for its subsistence. Since then, there are such different tendencies in the nature of man, and liberty also essential to him, he must be capable of acting differently according to the different direction of his instincts and affections; and his acting always right could not be absolutely secured, or the possibility of moral evil avoided, without such an interposition of almighty power, as would import an essential change in his frame and his state. In other words, if the divine perfections required that sin should be absolutely prevented, or not at all permitted, they required that such a being as man in a state of probation, should not be created: Which scarcely any considerate person will have the hardness to affirm.

Another consideration of great importance for our rightly understanding this subject, and vindicating the divine perfections, is, that God over-rules the moral evil which his providence permits, so that it becomes the occasion of good. Tho' he has laid us under an inviolable law *not to do evil that good may come*, (for the evil we do, proceeding from corrupt affections, a profess'd intention of good by the same actions must be an absurd and utterly inconsistent pretence; nor have we any certain foreknowledge of the supposed good event, or power to bring it to pass;) yet he is under no such restraint by the perfect purity and goodness of his nature, but that he may suffer his creatures, (so far suffer, as not to hinder them by an irresistible exertion of his almighty power,) to deviate voluntarily from the rule of right, intending to take the opportunity from their errors, of manifesting his wisdom and other attributes in a glorious manner, and of producing effects in the whole beneficial to his creation. As the obligation of preventing evil must be limited in the manner before explained; to what is fit and reasonable to be done, without infringing the essential liberty of rational agents, (which is God's own rule of proceeding, and also the rule he has given us for regulating our conduct towards our fellow-creatures; for he has not allowed us under the pretence of restraining them from sin, to encroach upon their freedom,) (no man surely imagines that charity requires or will justify him in it;) so instead of being inconsistent with the most perfect rectitude and goodness, it is a great demonstration of both, and of wisdom, to turn the follies and faults of men, in the event, to an occasion of promoting virtue and public happiness. Would it not be very commendable in any human government, from the very irregularities of subjects, in their own nature destructive, to take the opportunity of enacting wholesome laws, and forming useful schemes, which, with the tenderest pity to offenders should

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should not weaken the public securities, but tend more effectually to promote the common good? There is indeed a great disparity between human governments and the divine in this respect, that their foresight of the behaviour of subjects is limited and uncertain, and therefore it is not in their power, nor can they be obliged to take effectual measures for preventing crimes: Whereas God knows all things future as well as present with the greatest clearness and certainty. But this does not alter the case so far as it relates to the point we are now considering. For as his prescience is not the rule of his actions, but his perfect reason and the fitness of things; so on the other hand, the wisdom of human governors and their goodness would be justified, if they did foreknow future transgressions without interposing to prevent them by any methods of force, provided they could foreknow with certainty, and had it in their power to bring to pass from such transgressions, an increase both of moral and natural good; which we are sure God actually does, in many instances, and have reason to believe he does it universally.

We may consider then, what good the permission of moral evil appears to us in fact subservient to, at least the occasion of, and which it may reasonably be supposed that God intended. First, it is evident, that his own perfections are variously displayed in consequence of the sins of his creatures, and particularly of mankind. The perfect purity of his nature, or his aversion to evil, could not have appeared so fully if evil had never been; nor his impartial distinguishing justice in rendering to all moral agents according to their works. And above all, his goodness by the occasion of sin shines marvellously; his patience is exercised towards his guilty creatures; he shows a *desire to the offending works of his hands, and is kind to the unthankful and the evil*, at the same time that he has an indignation against their crimes; and pardoning mercy, of which there could have been no notion in

a state of innocence, appears now one of the most amiable glories of the Deity. It may be justly said, that the whole human race, though by corrupting their ways they have greatly altered their condition for the worse, yet they all continue in a state of trial, the objects of the divine goodness, which is not diminished by their sins, but exalted into pity; and that God has not left any of them without *witness of his mercy*, whereby they are invited to repentance, that they may be finally happy in his favour, though goodness has appeared in a distinguishing peculiar manner to some of them beyond others. If it be said, that supposing this to be true, that God has taken occasion from the sins of men to manifest his own perfections the more illustriously, it follows indeed that he has erected a monument to his glory; but how does it turn to the good of his creatures? I answer, that the glory of God and the happiness of the intelligent parts of the creation are inseparable; and whatever manifests the former actually does and was by him intended to promote the other. The displays of his power and wisdom, even in inanimate nature, must be supposed to have been principally designed for the benefit of rational beings in contemplating and enjoying it, for which purposes all the parts of the material world, known to us, are fitted in a wonderful variety. Much more the exercise of the divine attributes, (and especially goodness towards moral agents themselves,) has a direct tendency to excite in them, and also in other intelligent beings who are not the immediate objects of it, pious and devout affections, naturally accompanied with a high enjoyment; and thereby to promote virtue and universal rational happiness, more than in a different state of things there could have been occasion for.

Secondly, The permission of sin is so over-ruled by divine providence as to afford, by the consequences of it, an occasion for the various exercise of virtue; and thereby advancing the true perfection and happiness

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ness of the human nature. Sin has introduced these calamities and distresses into the world which try the integrity of good men, their patience, and confidence in God; and these are the finishing and most amiable parts of a beautiful moral character. We may further observe, that the passions and frailties of men tending to animosity and discord, are directly and immediately the occasion to others of practising the most excellent virtues: They are the occasions of their exercising forbearance, meekness, and the forgiveness of injuries, all sum'd up in benevolence, the noblest affection of the mind. These virtuous dispositions, by thus variously exerting themselves, are greatly strengthened; and so the capacity of the mind for various rational enjoyments is enlarged. Every instance of their probation, and the resolved vigorous exercise of them against a contrary tendency or violent temptation, lays a foundation for farther improvement in goodness, and brings a return of true and solid pleasure; so that from this state of infirmity and discipline the mind naturally grows up to a more exalted virtue, and to an increase of happiness, which otherwise it could not be capable of. We know not indeed what room there might be for a diversity of virtuous exercises, even in perfect innocence, whereby good affections might be confirmed, and the satisfaction resulting from them increased. But we know that, in our present state, some very important branches both of piety and charity are occasioned by the moral imperfections of men, as well as by some degrees of misery; and that the practice of these virtues eminently contributes both to private and public good. Whereby it appears, that good and evil are wisely mixed together, and set against each other in the condition of mankind, and that the permission of evil, (so far as God does permit it,) is not unworthy of the best of beings; since his providence over-rules it, in the event, to the promoting of good, as an occasion of the most various and illustrious exercise of virtue,

virtue, and of adding a high relish to the enjoyment which arises from it. And

Lastly, We may take the state of mankind, containing this puzzling appearance of moral evil, in another view, that is, as related to the rest of the rational creation; which, if it does not explain the difficulty, shews that, in all probability, the reason why we do not attain to a full and satisfying solution of it is, that the subject is above our comprehension, and that therefore the objection is founded not on evidence, but ignorance. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the affairs of this lower world, (principally those of its chief inhabitants,) have a relation to superior natures, and are extensively useful to the whole system of intelligent creatures. That there are in the universe other species of rational agents besides mankind, and above them, cannot well be doubted. When we consider the magnificence of the works of God; the vast fabric in which he has displayed his power and wisdom; that there are other globes at an immense distance from that where we dwell, and of incomparably greater magnitude: Who can imagine that they are all void of beings capable of rational enjoyment, and of celebrating the Creator's praise; and that this little earth is the only habitation of intelligencies? Now if there be a variety of particular systems in the moral as well as the natural world, and a diversity of administration in the divine government of them, they may have a mutual relation which we do not discern, and the affairs of one may answer purposes in another, and in the whole, which may surpass our present comprehension. As the state and situation of distant orbs render them useful to the earth, which may be also useful to them in a different way, all conspiring to make one regular harmonious system of material nature; the like order may be, and we have reason to believe there is established, among the several kinds of rational beings, which under different particular œconomies, do all of them together

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together make one beautiful and moral system. Who then that does not comprehend the whole, can take upon him to censure a part? Can he pretend to judge, that this mixt imperfect state of ours is a blemish in the universal frame, when he does not know how variously it may be related, and what purposes it may serve in the kingdom of God, and what events may arise from it beneficial to the whole, in the scheme of providence? Nay, upon this view of things, (which is vastly too large for our narrow understandings,) can we possibly be sure, that the permission of evil among men is not a necessary part of the intire moral constitution? This consideration may justly silence the impious clamours of short-sighted mortals against the wisdom and goodness of God, since it shows that they really amount to no more than this, that we cannot comprehend his counsels. And if we pursue our inquiries further into a future existence, where the last punishments are to be inflicted on men for their wickedness, (which our own foreboding thoughts naturally lead us to, and the scriptures explain it more fully as a most powerful argument to restrain men from evil,) of that state we can, at present, form but a very imperfect idea; the notices we have of it being only such as are intended for our advantage during our probation. But we may be assured that the most exact measure of rectitude, wisdom, and goodness will be observed in it. For if we have sufficient evidence that these perfections are the true characters of the active supreme mind which governs all, it would be unreasonable not to allow that they shall prevail every where and in every state; and consequently, that the last result of all the divine dispensations, comprehending the permission of evil, will be the greatest absolute good.

The sum of what has been offered upon the subject is, That God is not the author of moral evil, nor did he fore-ordain it in his everlasting counsels, as any part of his works: On the contrary, he always

disapproves it as an irregular production, whereof the creatures themselves are the sole causes, and directly opposite to the essential rectitude of his nature. But as he permits it in time, so far as not to prevent it by such extraordinary interpositions of his omnipotence as would violate the free-agency of his rational creatures, (which free-agency is an essential part of their constitution, necessary to their answering the ends of their being; necessary to their practising virtue, their attaining moral perfection and rational happiness;) so he foresaw it from eternity, and he chose to execute that scheme of creation and providence, as in the whole absolutely the best, upon which he knew that moral evil was unavoidable. We ourselves plainly discern that the permission of sin actually is, in many instances, the occasion of good; that it may be so in many more instances and ways; but we cannot comprehend them, because we cannot see the infinitely various relations of things in the universe. Indeed this must necessarily be the case with imperfect understandings, that things must appear to them differently from what they really are. We may therefore conclude that the objection, as formidable as it may seem at first, does not affect the doctrine it is urged against, which is otherwise so well established; but that all the most shocking appearances of evil in the world, the oppression of innocence, the success of tyranny, the covetousness, pride, wrath, and superstition of men spreading desolation thro' the earth,---that, I say, these, and other appearances like them, may terminate in good. It has often been so, and the consideration of the perfect goodness and wisdom of God, whose power is irresistible, satisfies us that it will be so universally. And for the miseries of incorrigible sinners in the other world, they shall be no greater, than what public order, and the universal good of the rational creation, requires them to be.

DISCOURSE IX.

The Goodness of God explained and improved.

[ABERNETHY.]

Mark x. 18.

There is none good but one, that is God.

THE most important doctrine which our Saviour asserts in the text, that *God is good*, which the scripture constantly teaches, (and indeed the very being of religion depends upon it,) I have endeavoured to prove by the manifold and most visible fruits of the divine beneficence which are scattered over all the earth, among the numberless multitude of living things which are in it, and for which the liberal author of nature has plentifully provided, giving every one what is most convenient for it, an enjoyment suitable to its nature and capacity; particularly, by the frame and constitution of the human nature, made for various happiness, and the administration of providence towards mankind. And I have endeavoured to vindicate this doctrine against the objections taken from the appearances of evil, both natural and moral, which are in the earth. The design of the present discourse is to explain this glorious attribute of the divine nature, and to shew what is the application,

application, and the practical improvement we ought to make of it.

Now, in order to understand the more distinctly what is meant when we say *that God is good*, or attribute that perfection to the Deity, let us, first, consider the notion of goodness in general. And here we proceed upon a sure and clear foundation; for scarcely is there any thing of which we have a more distinct idea, no sensible being or quality is more easily perceived: The mind of man as readily distinguishes between goodness and the contrary disposition in a free agent, as we know the difference between black and white by our eyes, or between other opposite qualities by any of our senses. Goodness then, in the strict and proper sense in which we are now considering it, (not as comprehending universal rectitude, which it is sometimes used to denote, and which constitutes the intire character of a good moral agent,) signifies benevolence, or a disposition to communicate happiness. This is the plain meaning of the word when we apply it to man, or any other intelligent being. A good man is one who from an inward inclination exerts his power in doing good; not who is the passive instrument or occasion of it, (which even an inanimate thing, incapable of any kind of intention may be,) or who acting for his own private interest, and from merely selfish motives, may be accidentally useful to the public or to some of his fellow-creatures; but he is a good man who acts voluntarily and of choice for the benefit of others, and his inclination and his active powers terminate upon that as their proper end.

In the same sense, though in an infinitely more perfect manner, and higher degree, God is good; that is, He is a being of kind affection, who from an inward principle of good-will exerts his omnipotence in diffusing happiness far and wide, in all fitting proportion, according to the different capacities of the creatures which are the proper objects of goodness,

and according to the direction of his most perfect wisdom. It is a very wrong notion which some have of the moral perfections of God, particularly his goodness, that they are high excellencies of his nature, not only superior in degree, and free from all infirmity, but wholly different in kind, from moral qualities in the creatures; having indeed an analogy to them, because of their producing some similar effects, but no otherwise attributed to the Deity than as human passions are, in a figurative and improper sense; and in their real nature so transcendent, that our understandings cannot form a distinct conception of them, so that the words whereby they are expressed, have no such determinate idea annexed to them as when they are used for the moral dispositions of inferior agents. This has an unhappy tendency to destroy true practical religion; for it essentially consists in an imitation of the divine and moral perfections, and a suitable affectionate regard to them, together with the genuine fruits of it in sincere obedience to the laws of God; all which must be defeated, if our apprehensions concerning the moral attributes are uncertain. If when we say that God is holy, righteous, true, and good, we mean only that he is something we don't know what, incomprehensibly high and excellent; which produces, it is true, some effects like those which the properties in men signified by these words would produce, but of the inward principle itself in the supreme mind we have no clear idea,—How can this be the object of our adoration, of our reverence, love, and esteem? We know distinctly what the goodness of other agents is; that it means a disposition to do good to others, or to make them happy; and this, in proportion to the degree of it, appears to us amiable. But if the goodness of God be not the same, only more perfect in the principle, and more extensive in the measure of its exercise than it can be in inferior beings, what is there in it to engage our affections and our gratitude? How, again, can

we, according to this confused and undetermined sense of the divine goodness, make it the object of our confidence, which is an essential part of religion? And how can it be the rational foundation of hope and of inward security and peace to the human mind? All our expectations of good, considered as merely gratuitous, from any agent, are founded on the supposition of a benevolent principle in him. But if benevolence in God be a quite different thing from what it is in other good beings, so that we cannot distinctly perceive what it is, how shall we hope for any thing from him? And lastly, how can we follow God as dear children, and particularly, imitate his goodness (which certainly is a most important branch of our duty, and absolutely necessary to our pleasing him,) if we do not understand what his goodness is, or have not a determinate idea of it?

Let us observe in the second place, That we must take care not to impute to the supreme absolutely perfect Being any thing like human infirmity. There are weaknesses which cleave to our nature in every part of it, which accompany the exercise of all our powers, even our moral capacities, and best affections. To understand this the better, and that we may avoid the dangerous error of attributing any imperfection to the Deity, let us consider that there are two great principles of action in the mind of man, *benevolence* and *self-love*, which are really distinct, and form different ultimate ends, which we pursue without seeing, at least attending to any connection or dependence between them. Self-love determines us to seek private good, or our own happiness: By benevolence we are inclined to pursue the good of others. And this every man who seriously reflects, will find in himself, though in some it is weaker, and in some stronger, according to the degree of men's attention to it, and of its vigorous customary exercise, whereby it is confirmed, and its power encreased, the force of habit being added to that of nature. From this we gather, what are the
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ends of our being, I mean, for which God ordained it; and they are, *happiness* and *usefulness*. The gracious Creator intending that the individual should be happy, planted in every one self-love, by which all are carried to the pursuit of that end; and he intended the good of the whole, and therefore united all men in the bond of benevolence. But these two principles have each of them particular affections and passions belonging to them, in order to give them the greater efficacy in cases which most require their vigorous operation; and to answer the circumstances of our present state. The general desire of our own happiness is cool and dispassionate, directing to a regular uniform course of action. But there being a variety of things necessary or convenient for the present life which it would not put us upon seeking, using or avoiding, with the dispatch and earnestness that is required, therefore this want is supplied by particular appetites and passions, attended with an uneasiness sufficient to give them the needful force. In like manner, a common undistinguishing benevolence which unites us to the whole human species, nay to the whole system of intelligent beings, in itself a noble and very strong principle, yet is not sufficient to all purposes in the present condition of mankind, considering the imperfection of our understandings and other circumstances. Therefore there are particular instincts of the publick kind planted in us, and many of them also are attended with uneasiness, to make them the more vigorous and active. For example, the helpless state of children requires a peculiar care; and there is a strong affection to them planted in parents, which puts them upon running the utmost hazards and enduring extreme toil and pain, for the relief of their tender off-spring. And because mankind in this world are liable to, and some of them actually fall into great dangers and distresses, therefore have we the common, powerful, and painful instinct of *compassion* exciting and determining

us suddenly to exert all our ability as the urgent need requires.

It is here that we must carefully distinguish, (as undoubtedly there is a great difference,) between the goodness of God and men. The universal, calm, and dispassionate benevolence, we may safely attribute to him in the strictest and most proper sense, having nothing in it but what is excellent and worthy of his transcendent glory; as the measure of it which our nature is adorned with, is in us the noblest part of the divine image. But we must not imagine that there is in the Deity any of the infirmity or uneasiness, which in men accompanies particular kind affections: and when such affections are ascribed to him, as they frequently are in scripture, it must only be understood in a figurative sense, by way of analogy, and we must take care to remove from our idea of them, all the imperfections and pains which we know by experience cleave to human passions, even of the most generous and beneficent kind. Thus, God is represented as our father, and as having a paternal tenderness for us; nay a greater, a more continually careful, and watchful love, than a mother has for her sucking child, which gives us a very high idea of his kindness: But we should be far from imagining any thing in him of the weakness or uneasiness which attends the affection of an indulgent earthly parent. His pity also is described in very strong terms. Alluding to the exertion of that instinct in the human nature, it is said, that *his bowels sound* for the distresses of his creatures, and that he is *afflicted in their afflictions*. But the meaning of all this is no more, than that his undisturbed benevolence continually exercised towards them, produces more perfectly the effects which the tenderest human compassion would produce, without the weaknesses and the pains of it.

Thirdly, It seems to be a just and necessary consequence from what has been already observed, that the goodness of God extends to all the proper objects of

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of goodness. We know nothing in ourselves, nor can imagine any thing in moral agents to limit that general good-will, which must always appear to us the glory of an intelligent nature. We know nothing, I say, to limit it, but particular attachments, and partial distinguishing affections, which are very useful in our present state, because of its indigence and weakness; but they always carry in them the idea of imperfection, and are therefore not to be attributed to the supreme Being. From which we conclude, that wherever there are fit objects of good-will, and he knows them all, his good-will is exercised towards them. And this, when we calmly consider it, raises the divine beneficence high in our esteem; nor could that attribute in any other view, or supposing it more confined in its exercise, appear to our minds so amiable, and so perfect. Now if the whole system of beings that are the proper objects of goodness, that is, which are capable of happiness, be the intire objects of God's kindness and care, it follows, that as he is perfectly wise, and knows all the possible relations, connexions, and dependencies of things, his beneficence, in conjunction with infinite wisdom, always determines him to do what is best in the whole, or for the most absolute universal good. How can it possibly be imagined but that the most extensive benevolence, in a being perfectly intelligent, must produce the most extensive happiness, which is its proper fruit? And hence we further infer, that as in the present state of mankind, some unhappiness is mixt with all the good they possess; as some degrees of pain or uneasiness may be necessary to the greater good of individuals, and the sufferings of individuals may be necessary to the good of the whole, or to a general and more extensive good of many; so we may be sure that one or other of these is always the case in the divine administration, though not being able to comprehend the intire scheme, we cannot see it in every particular instance;—We may be sure, I say it is always so, that when any individual creature suffers,
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it is for the greater good of that creature itself or for a more general good. And applying this to moral agents, the principal objects of the divine beneficence, whenever they suffer, as they do often by the hand of the *righteous judge of all the earth* for their faults, it is always either for their own amendment,) which is the greatest immediate good to them, and will end in their happiness,) or else it is for a more publick advantage to the moral world.

What has been said, represents God as necessarily intending the greatest good of the rational creation; but that necessity must be understood in a way consistent with the most perfect free-agency: It arises not from a defect of power or liberty, but from the absolute perfection of his moral attributes, and of his wisdom. There are some things which are commonly said to act necessarily, as inanimate beings, (though properly speaking they do not act at all.) So the fire burns, and the sun gives light; and in beings endued with freedom, some of their capacities are not the subjects of that freedom. Thus we ourselves are conscious of liberty in acting; but we are conscious, at the same time, that liberty does not belong to all the powers of our nature; our understandings are exercised necessarily, and perceptions arise in them independently of our own choice. In like manner, we must conceive a difference between the natural and moral attributes of the Deity: He is *necessarily* not only immense and eternal, but omniscient; but he is *freely* just and good: These attributes belonging properly to his will, which is essentially free in its exercise, as the image of it is in the *liberty* of intelligent creatures; they exert themselves not necessarily, (meaning by that, independently on his own choice,) but voluntarily, which makes them appear so amiable, worthy to be praised and admired, as the virtuous instincts of our nature direct us to esteem *inferior* free-agents, who are beneficent and just. Still however it is as truly impossible, (though for a different reason,) that God should

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should not be just and good, or that he should not exercise justice and goodness, as that he should be ignorant or weak, or even that he should cease to be.

The point now under consideration is certainly of the greatest importance to the purposes of practical religion, to direct our sentiments concerning the conduct of divine providence towards mankind, to regulate our affections to God, and our expectations from him. On the one hand, we are not to consider the divine goodness, as if it were an unintelligent principle acting necessarily, (which supposition tends to destroy all true piety, all reverence and esteem of God, and gratitude to him; and as he is a being of the most perfect wisdom and rectitude as well as benevolence, we are not to entertain any expectations from him, but such as are worthy of his intire character, not to hope for any thing but what is reasonable and fit, and what it becomes the wise and impartially righteous, as well as gracious governor of the world, to give.) On the other hand, since the divine goodness is and must be exercised towards all the proper objects of goodness, and in the best manner carries on the greatest absolute good or happiness of the whole intelligent system, it is evident that God does not act towards any of his reasonable creatures in the way of absolute dominion. He is indeed absolute sovereign, *who can do whatever pleaseth him in heaven and earth*, whose power the united strength of the creatures cannot resist, *none can stay his hand, or say to him, What dost thou?* The inanimate part of the creation is under the sole command of his irresistible will; *he speaks and it is done, he commands and it stands fast*; but his will is always for good to the beings which are the objects of beneficence, that is, which are capable of happiness. No other reason can be assigned for bringing them into being, than that he was so good as to intend the communicating of happiness; and there is no other end pursued in the whole of his government over them. As the good rulers of civil societies,

societies, stiled in scripture Gods upon earth, are the fathers of their people, the true end of their authority is only the public good, to which they should continually attend, and which they should constantly aim at in the exercise of their power, in inflicting punishments as well as dispensing rewards, never acting from caprice, or a lust of domination, and merely to shew their own greatness, which is unworthy of a wise governor; so the government of the supreme Law-giver and Lord of the whole world, of the goodness as well as greatness whereof the best and the highest civil authority is but a faint image, is always invariably conducted by the same rule, having no other design than the greatest absolute good; never appointing any of his creatures to happiness or misery, as an arbitrary sovereign, and merely because he will, but according to the most perfect wisdom, equity and goodness, and so, as in the best manner to promote the advantage of the whole creation. Some expressions of scripture have been interpreted to a different sense, and understood as signifying that God appoints men even to final happiness and misery, *merely* from an absolute will, without any consideration of their behaviour. Particularly some expound *thus* these words of the Apostle, *Rom. ix. 20, 21*, which are an answer to the foolish cavils and complaints of men against the equity of the divine government over the nations of mankind;—*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God, shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?* But this passage has no relation to the exercise of God's authority, as judge in dispensing happiness or misery to the individuals of mankind, in which the measures of equity and goodness directed by wisdom to pursue the universal good, shall be exactly observed; but it relates to nations, and other great collective bodies of men, some of whom God raises up, bestowing high privileges

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privileges upon them; and others he casts down, after having permitted them to continue long in their wickedness, abusing his patience, whereby his power and justice appear the more eminently in their destruction. The subject there treated of, is the rejection of the *Jews* from the national advantages they possessed as the people of God, and the calling of the *Gentiles*, which the Apostle resolves into the sovereignty of providence, and justifies his doing so, by declarations of the old testament, concerning the difference God made between *Jacob* and *Esau*, without any consideration of their having done good or evil, which declarations evidently relate not to themselves *personally*, but to the posterity. As in all the works of God there is a beautiful variety; some have higher, some lower degrees of perfection, in which his wisdom and his supreme dominion are manifested; so his providence makes a distinction among men with respect to gifts and outward privileges: But he is good to all, and will judge every one of mankind with the most impartial equity, according to the improvement they made of the talents committed to them, and their obedience to the laws they were under.

Lastly, The only principle from which we can conceive God acts towards any object without him, or towards any or all of the creatures which derive their beings from him, is goodness. When we reflect upon ourselves, (and it is by attending to our own powers and affections of which we are conscious that we take our rise to the consideration of, and forming such a judgment as we are able to form concerning superior intelligent natures, and even the supreme,) we find, as has been already observed, two general springs of action in our mind, *self-love* and *benevolence*. All our particular desires, affections and passions may be reduced to these two, and are comprehended in them. We cannot, I think, help judging after the same manner concerning all other beings like ourselves, that is all free-agents, that they constantly pursue

pursue either their own good or the good of others. For we have no notion of any other springs of action than affections (or some principles analogous to affections in us) which constitute the ends of rational action; and no agent can have any object of affection, but either himself or some other being. Now, applying this to our conceptions of the Deity, and his manner of acting, we cannot imagine that he acts for himself in the sense we are now speaking of; that is, that in any of his works, or in any fact which terminates on other beings, he pursues his own happiness, in such a sense as to imply indigence, and that his happiness depends on something without him. A being which is self-sufficient, and absolutely perfect and blessed, and who was so from eternity before any thing besides himself subsisted, cannot want any thing to make him happy, and therefore cannot be supposed to design the supply of his own wants in any thing he does. What can any creature possibly give him, or what can he receive from it? He was perfectly satisfied in himself, and in the contemplation and enjoyment of his own infinite excellencies from everlasting, and therefore must be supposed to act towards all things without him, from a motive of mere goodness.

It may be alledged, that as the Deity is interested by his goodness itself in the affairs of his reasonable creatures, he has complacency in their happiness, which is originally his own gift; he is pleased with their good moral conduct, and that felicity which is the result of it, and the contrary is displeasing to him; we can hardly avoid apprehending that his enjoyment has some dependence on their behaviour and their condition. For if we form our notion of the perceptions and sentiments of other intelligent beings, by a regard to what we find in ourselves, we do not know how to separate the approbation of a good moral character, and the happiness consequent upon it, from pleasure; and the disapprobation of a bad character with a sense of the misery that follows it, from

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from some degree of uneasiness. It may therefore be supposed that God foreseeing these opposite events which must differently affect him, *for his own sake* determined to choose the one, and do whatever was fit for avoiding the other ; that is, acted not merely for the good of his rational creatures, but for himself or his own enjoyment. If this reasoning be ever so just, it does not, nor ought to diminish in our esteem the benevolence manifested in the work of creation, and the good communicated to the creatures. Is any being accounted the less beneficent because he finds pleasure in his beneficence ? Is any man the less generous and disinterested in supplying the wants of the indigent who can be no way profitable to him, because he has, and knows before hand he shall have satisfaction in his liberality ? Much less can the complacency which the supreme independent Being has in the manifestation of his goodness, be thought any diminution of that goodness, or be any pretence for alledging that he acts from selfish motives, as if he wanted any thing, the communication of good being the immediate end of his works, chosen for its own sake, and not from any *indigence* of his. Besides, the changes which happen in the condition of the creatures, their acting right or wrong, their being happy or miserable, should not be imagined to affect the Deity, tho' perfectly perceiving them, and perfectly pure and good, in the same manner as they do good men, or any other finite good agents. They have, and cannot avoid having, new affections excited by events to them intirely new ; pleasure arising from present good, pain from present evil, which they had not while it was future. But he to whose mind nothing has any appearance different from what it had in his eternal foreknowledge, possesses the same unvaried tranquillity in all the vicissitudes of time. The whole series of events, in the foreseen order, passes under the observation of his eye without any alteration or exciting any emotion in his undisturbed perfect mind.

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He is capable of no surprise, no painful sensation of *sorrow* from any calamity, or of *resentment* against any moral disorder, nor properly of *joy*, as that signifies a new sensation of pleasure, from any good which arrives. All things which come to pass are comprehended in the scheme of providence which was formed in his eternal counsels; and as the appearances of evil were not unexpected, they produce no uneasiness. And the afore-appointed good issue is the subject of his everlasting, delightful, serene contemplation, not heightened by its arrival, as it is in weak minds, to surprising and tumultuous delight. Upon the whole, since all the good that is in the creatures, natural or moral, is originally from God, and all the enjoyment to *him* which can be supposed to arise from it, is the result of his own operations, always the same and uninterrupted; it may be properly called self-enjoyment inseparable from his own perfections and the exercise of them; and therefore the end of his works, is not the acquisition of felicity from other beings, but the communication of good to them, or in other words, the principle is *benevolence*.

It is commonly said that the *glory of God* is the end of the creation and of all his actions towards the creatures. And if this be the meaning---that all his actions, his forming the world, and his whole administration in the government of it, is worthy of himself, becoming the most excellent and perfect of all beings, and that his perfections are manifested in conjunction, and in a beautiful harmony by all his works, it is just. None of the divine attributes is exercised singly. As *eternal power is clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made*, the same things manifest eternal wisdom; and as goodness is evidently the character of God's government of the moral world, the most perfect rectitude shines in it with equal lustre. In this sense, he is glorified in all his ways, and all his works; and in his eternal counsels, he intended it should be so. But if we enquire concerning

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cerning the principle from which the supreme Being acts, in framing and disposing both the material and the rational creation, the former evidently subservient to the other, I think it appears from what has been already said, that it can be no other than benevolence; and consequently the end is no other than the communication of perfection and happiness, which he diffuses through all the universe, in such measures, and with such variety, as at the same time to manifest his glorious power and wisdom.

But though it may be said, (in the sense just now mentioned,) that the glory of God is the end of his works, and of his eternal purposes, we should take care to avoid another, and a very wrong meaning of that expression. Let it be far from us to entertain any such thought concerning him, as if he had any thing like the ambitious views of weak mortals, to raise monuments to his honour. The desire of honour is indeed an original desire in *our* nature, and a very useful part of our constitution; having a tendency to the support of virtue, and to the public good: But it carries in it the marks of insufficiency and dependence. The great God is therefore infinitely above the need of it; and it is beneath the high perfection of his nature to act from such a motive. We cannot, I think, but acknowledge in our hearts, that to act from a principle of pure disinterested goodness, and with the sole design of communicating good, is more excellent and amiable; and to conceive thus of the Deity, is to conceive of him the most highly and honourably, which is the best rule we can follow in forming our apprehensions concerning him. It is true, God requires that his reasonable creatures should make his glory the end of their actions; that they should honour him with their devout acknowledgments, and the outward signs of adoration, which will appear to themselves a reasonable service, and what the best principles in their nature direct them to. But even this he requires for their sakes, not his own; and the

affections he has planted in their nature whereby they are determined to it, bear the plainest marks of his goodness, for it is their most delightful exercise, and affords the highest enjoyment they are capable of.

What has been said under this last head, shews us the reason of the assertion in the text, that none is good but God: Which is not to be understood absolutely, for there is real moral goodness in some creatures; but the supreme Being alone is *essentially* and *immutably* good, the sole original fountain of all goodness and happiness. And this is peculiar to him, that whereas from the limited condition of all other intelligent agents, it necessarily follows, that their own happiness must be an object of their pursuit, and an end of their actions, (they seek it from God, and they receive it from him) he, having in himself an underived sufficiency for his own unchangeable blessedness, infinitely above the need, or even the possibility of an addition from any other cause, acts purely and wholly from a principle of benevolence. I come,

In the next place, to consider what is the proper application and practical improvement of this whole subject. And, first, we and all intelligent creatures are indispensably obliged to praise God, to *call upon our souls, and all that is within us, to bless and magnify him*. This is a tribute which our own reason, and the instinct of gratitude planted in our nature, will teach us to pay to him, as a kind and gracious benefactor. We cannot indeed but highly esteem a beneficent disposition wherever it appears, though we ourselves do not partake of the benefits which flow from it. What acknowledgments then are due to the universal benefactor, the original author of all happiness, to whose favour we ourselves owe our being, and all the enjoyments we possess, and on whose bounty all our future hopes depend? His compassion to us is not lessened by the diffusiveness of his liberality to other beings: We are as much and constantly cared for by him, as if we were the sole objects of his

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care. And since in an infinite variety of creatures, which are capable of enjoyment, not one is neglected, he gives to all that which is convenient for them. Those, whose faculties enable them to discern his hand so freely opened to distribute various happiness, ought to join according to their several capacities, in celebrating the glory of his benignity. Particularly, as an affection for our own species is natural to our minds, and inseparable from them, when we consider God as the common father of mankind, doing good to them, and leaving none of them without witnesses of his tender pity, He must in that view appear very amiable to us, most worthy to receive our united thanksgivings and honour. The narrow notions which some have of the divine goodness, as if it were confined to a few, while others no less capable are overlooked or rejected, and which tend to change the idea of the attribute itself into that of arbitrary will,---These notions, I say, seem to take their rise from the selfish desires too prevalent in some minds, of enjoying happiness by way of peculiar property and distinction from their fellows. But to a well-disposed benevolent heart, the more extensive beneficence appears, the more it is esteemed; and there cannot be a more delightful object of its contemplation, than the mercy of God dispensing its gifts freely to every individual of the human race, reaching out its unsparing hand to supply all their wants, and making no other distinction than what arises from the different qualifications of the particular objects, and what wisdom requires to be made for the greater advantage of the whole. This, which I hope has been sufficiently shewn to be the just way of thinking concerning the divine philanthropy, challenges our most affectionate esteem; indeed should raise it to the highest admiration. And when we consider that the love of God is the only spring of our happiness, indeed all happiness; and that he does good, not like needy creatures, who give, hoping for something again,

(the very best of them, not unreasonably, nor to their reproach, seek the continuance and increase of their felicity as not immutable and absolutely perfect;)---when we consider that the only principle of his actions is pure benevolence; and his kind intentions terminate on the happiness of other beings, the greatest and most universal happiness as their ultimate end; do not our most exalted praises, the utmost gratitude of our souls, sink far beneath what we must acknowledge to be due? *What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits?* What returns can we make, which shall bear any proportion to the kindness of his unmerited affection, or the sovereign freeness of his mercy, and the extent of its fruits, for both are not only unparalleled, but exceed our comprehension? Surely it becomes us to celebrate his glory, and to offer him the sacrifice of our thanksgivings, with sincerely willing and joyful hearts. No one can imagine that the praises of our lips only, or the mere external professions of gratitude, are a suitable or will be an acceptable acknowledgment of his favour. What goodness,---such unexampled goodness first of all demands, is true undissembled and superlative love, which will naturally arise in our minds, if we carefully attend to the motives of love contained in the character of the object, and particularly his benignity; and if we do not suffer ourselves to be diverted and prepossessed by an immoderate indulgence of selfish affections. Accordingly this is the sum of religion, to which the divine goodness is the strongest motive, and as our Saviour calls it, the first and great commandment; * *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*, that is sincerely, and constantly.

Secondly, The goodness of God is the proper object of our reverence and fear, as well as love. Thus the prophet † *Hosea* describes the religion of the *Israelites in the latter days*, after that long afflictions,

* Mat. xxii. 37.

† Hof. iii. 5.

and other methods of divine instruction shall bring them to juster sentiments and better dispositions, than those which prevailed among them during their degeneracy, *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness.* Such a perfect character as that of the Deity, comprehending all moral excellencies, and particularly glorious benevolence, calls for the most awful respect of all attentive minds: and an ingenuous heart will be afraid of offending him, for this very reason, because he is so good, and will conceive an indignation against sin on this account, that it is not only a dishonour done to the supreme law-giver, but ingratitude to the best benefactor. Who would not be ashamed of such baseness, as to provoke and affront one who is continually kind and beneficent even to the unthankful and the evil, and always heaping favours on the undeserving? These two principles, the love and the fear of God, are the great security of our duty, and will be the lasting springs of sincere obedience to his commandments. The scripture constantly teaches us, (and it must be very evident to the reason of men,) that pious affections, gratitude and reverence to the best of beings, are in vain pretended to, without the practice of virtue. This is the love of God, and this is his fear, that we do his will; that we fulfil the works of his law *written in our hearts*, and declared in his *word*, by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this world. And this consideration of the divine goodness shows the folly of sin, as well as ingratitude and baseness. For how unreasonable is it that men should transgress those commandments which are given them merely for their own sakes, and to make them happy? All the bad effects of their disobedience and provocations must fall upon themselves. * *If they sin what do they against God? or if their transgressions be multiplied, what do they unto him?* The sole intention of his laws is their good; of which they may de-

* Job xxxv. 6.

prive themselves by their wickedness, but cannot affect his unchangeable happiness, which has no dependence on any thing in their power.

Thirdly, As to the goodness of God we owe our being, all the powers of our nature, the privileges of our condition, and whatever happiness we possess, so it is the just object of our affectionate confidence, and the only foundation of our hope for the future. What security can we, or any creatures have, that our existence and all the advantages and enjoyments we have, shall be continued, or our felicity increased, but that the *father of lights from whom every good gift comes down* is without variableness or shadow of turning. But let it be remembered, that we are not to entertain expectations from the divine goodness, as if it were an unintelligent proneness to communicate benefits: it is exercised with freedom and the manifestations of it are always directed by the most perfect wisdom. And since the intire end which the good governor of the world pursues is the greatest absolute good, or the highest happiness of the whole rational system, it is unreasonable to expect a profusion of beneficence towards every individual, in such a way, and upon such terms, as would be hurtful to the whole. But it ought not to be said, that this renders our hopes with respect to ourselves utterly uncertain, since we, not being able to comprehend the scheme of the divine administration cannot conclude concerning any particular supposable event, however grievous it may be to us, or other individuals, that it is inconsistent with the most public good, and therefore our confidence in the most perfect goodness, thus explained, cannot make us secure against it. For, besides that doing all for the best, must appear amiable to us in the supreme agent, our minds necessarily approve it, and we ought therefore to acquiesce in it with pleasure, it cannot be reasonably imagined that the extreme insupportable unhappiness of individuals can be necessary to the good of the

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the whole, excepting one case which our reason sufficiently instructs us to be aware of, and we have it in our power to prevent it. The case is this, we are sure that for God to make no difference between good and evil in moral agents, and to communicate as much happiness to the vicious and wicked as to the best and most virtuous, that this would not be for the greatest good of the world, but destructive of it, as tending to take away the greatest encouragement to, and to subvert the very foundations of virtue, which is the true happiness of rational creatures: and therefore for men to pretend, that they trust in the goodness of God, while they live in contempt of his laws, and persist impenitently in their wicked courses, is the highest presumption; such expectation of favour from him being contrary to the reason of things, and the established order of his government, and inconsistent with goodness itself directed by wisdom, which requires that a distinction should be made between the righteous and the wicked by the judge of the world, at such time, and in such manner as he sees fit, and that transgressors should be punished for the safety and benefit of the whole. But if we faithfully and constantly adhere to our duty, and our hearts do not condemn us, then *have we confidence towards God on a solid foundation, that however, in the present state, all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the good and to the sinner, yet finally, and in the main, it shall be well with the righteous, and that happiness is inseparably connected with virtue.*

It amounts to the same thing, if we set this point in somewhat a different light, and consider the presumptuous and pretended hopes of impenitent sinners in the mercy of God, as inconsistent with the notions which reason, as well as the scripture teaches us of his other attributes, his wisdom, his justice, and the essential rectitude of his nature, which will not suffer us to believe that he will always, and in the whole of his administration, heap his benefits

without distinction on the righteous and the wicked. Nor is this any reflection on his most perfect goodness, which requires to its exercise a proper qualified object. As the only object of power are things possible, and the only object of wisdom are things reasonable and fit, so among moral agents, the only qualified objects of the divine goodness, in the sense here spoken of, that is *approbation*, are the sincerely virtuous. And as the perfections of the Deity are exercised in a perfect harmony, infinite power never does, it may be said, cannot do, what is disagreeable to wisdom or to the moral attributes, so the moral attributes never interfere with each other: goodness is not manifested in such an undistinguishing manner, as to dishonour the *righteousness* of the supreme ruler. But of all sinners they are the most inexcusable, and have the least reason to expect the divine favour, who presuming upon it, take encouragement from thence to continue in their disobedience, who, as the scripture expresses it, * *Turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, and † *because sentence against evil works is not speedily executed, therefore wholly set their hearts to do evil*. Such have reason to expect a peculiarly severe punishment, and that, as Moses speaks, ‡ *The Lord will not spare them, who bearing the words of his law, bless themselves, saying, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imaginations of our hearts*: or, as St. Paul teaches, || *They who despise the goodness and forbearance of God, which should lead them to repentance, and persisting in the hardness and impenitence of their hearts, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. And,

Lastly, We should always endeavour to imitate the divine goodness. That which is the glory of the supreme Being, and adds a lustre to all his other perfections, must even in the inferior degree in which the reasonable creatures are capable of it, be the

* Jude iv. † Eccles. viii. 11. ‡ Deut. xxix. 19, 20. || Rom. ii. highest

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highest excellency of their nature. And accordingly, beneficence is always regarded among men as the noblest quality, as that which signifies the most perfect character, and procures the most universal esteem. * *St. Paul*, agreeably to the general sense of mankind, makes a distinction between the righteous and the good man; the former is justly valued, but the other appears much more amiable and praiseworthy. And as thus we shall be perfect like our heavenly father, and obtain the approbation of men, the consciousness of having merited it and of possessing that excellent quality, always shewing itself by its genuine fruits, will always yield the greatest inward peace and security to our own minds. We shall reflect upon it with pleasure, and look forward to eternity with confidence, for God will surely reward them who follow his example; who with sincere affection pursue the great end of his own administration, *the universal happiness, and are merciful as he is merciful.*

* *Rom. v.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE X.

The Justice of God explained and proved.

[ABERNETHY.]

Psaln lxxxix. 14.

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.

JUSTICE has always been considered by wise men as one of the principal moral virtues. It contributes eminently to the universal good of mankind; for without it the peace and order of societies could not possibly subsist, nor could any individual enjoy the privileges of his nature, and the advantages of his condition with safety. It is one of those qualities belonging to human dispositions and actions which we necessarily approve; and the things which are just, always appear virtuous and praise-worthy. We conclude therefore, that justice has the sanction of God's own authority, and is an essential part of his law of nature: and since we conceive in it an absolute excellence every way worthy of his supreme dignity and glory, we attribute it to himself, and number it among his moral perfections. 'Tis true, there is a great difference between the exercise of justice, and even the foundations of it, in God, and in men. For there being an equality

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lity among *them* in their most important interests, they have all demands of right one upon another, and fundamental privileges not subject to any human authority, which cannot be invaded without iniquity. Whereas no creature can lay *him* under any previous obligation, nor have an independent title whereby they may claim any thing from him; for their very beings, and all they have in possession or expectation, are his gifts. But since it appears in his own constitution, that there is an established relation of persons and things, and a fitness resulting from it that the condition of moral agents should be according to their behaviour, we may be sure he will preserve that relation inviolable, and always act agreeably to that fitness, or that *the judge of the whole world will do right*. This has been ever received as an essential principle of religion: indeed if it be denied, the foundations of piety are destroyed at once, and there can be no such thing as a rational fear of God. It is elegantly expressed and strongly asserted by *Elibu*, as a point wherein all men of understanding are agreed,---* *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment*. In discoursing on this subject, I will first endeavour to give you a true notion of the justice of God, and to prove that it is an absolute perfection of his nature. Secondly, to shew, more particularly, in what instances it is exercised.

First, To shew what is meant by the justice of God, and to prove that it is an absolute perfection of his nature. In explaining the divine attribute of goodness, I observed that it is the sole principle from which the supreme Being acts towards the proper objects of it; that is, all sensitive and intelligent crea-

* Job xxxiv, 10, 11, 12.

tures, and that it extends to them all,---That he being infinitely above all indigence or the need of any thing from without to the continuance or increase of his self-sufficient, most perfect, and unchangeable happiness, always exerts his power in forming and disposing of things purely from a motive of benevolence, and with an intention not to receive but to communicate happiness;---and that the intire adequate object of the divine beneficence is the whole system of living things; to all which he does good in fitting proportion, according to their several capacities, especially the rational system or the moral world, for the universal happiness whereof he constantly provides in the best manner, diffusing his bounty to each individual, under no other limitation than what arises from the wise design of subordinating it to the most public good. If this be so, justice can be no otherwise considered than as goodness towards moral agents regulated in its exercise by wisdom; or, as wisely, and in the most proper manner pursuing, not the private and separate, but the united good of all intelligent beings. And indeed this is the worthiest, and most becoming notion we can have, of the just and wise administration of the universal sovereign *Monarchy*, to which its low image, the idea of a good human government naturally leads us. For the chief, nay the sole end of civil authority being the good of the community over which it is appointed, and the good of particular persons, whether magistrates or subjects, so far only, as it is consistent with and subservient to *that*; all acts of power ought to pursue it uniformly, and ought to be so designed by the persons with whom power is entrusted. What then is the justice of a human governor? Nothing else than his promoting to the best of his understanding, the safety and happiness of the society. Not only justice is to be exercised consistently with that design, but affection to the public is the true principle of it, and the public good should be its ultimate

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mate end. The sole motive to the inflicting of necessary punishment should not be passion, or a regard to the supposed rights and honour of *affronted Majesty* as a separate interest; but the same goodness of disposition, or benevolence to the collective body, and desire of promoting the general welfare, which in other instances (where it can be safely done,) produces effects that give pleasure to all as far as they can reach, without putting any one to pain. In like manner ought we to form our conceptions concerning the justice of God. Having an unlimited dominion over all intelligent beings, he is inclined by the benignity of his nature to do them the greatest good, and to promote their most extensive happiness. But that same benignity of his nature, exerts itself freely with perfect wisdom, and therefore differently, according to the diversity of their conduct and circumstances; it shews favour or communicates pleasure to qualified objects, having for its ultimate end the producing of the greatest monument of good. It with-holds favour, or inflicts punishment on the particular unqualified objects of happiness, for the same ultimate end, the producing of the greatest good. In other words, the divine *justice* or *righteousness*, (however it may be differently apprehended as a distinct property, and it may be usefully so represented, yet really is nothing else but his goodness directed to its exercise by infinite wisdom to pursue its proper end, the greatest and most absolute good of all rational beings in the best manner, and with that diversity in its administration, which their different behaviour and circumstances require.

We ought, above all things, to avoid imputing to the Deity infirmities and passions like those we find in ourselves, and which often corrupt the springs of action, even mixing themselves with good dispositions. I observed before, in explaining the goodness of God, that besides the principle of benevolence in the human mind determining it to seek the

public happiness, there are likewise particular instincts planted in our nature, *not* selfish, but inclining us to assist and relieve our indigent fellow creatures; such as compassion and natural affection, which are attended with weakness and perturbation; and these we ought not to attribute to God, except in a figurative sense and by way of analogy. We have at least equal reason to avoid attributing to him painful and disturbing resentment, which often arises in the human mind against moral evil; which, so far as it proceeds from the constitution of nature and is faultless, seems to be intended as an excitation to justice. The supreme mind is altogether free from what is strictly and properly called wrath, and from the least degree of uneasiness, in disapproving the faults of his creatures; and when it is necessary to use the chastening rod, or even to proceed to the severest punishment, he does it with the same undisturbed calmness, and the same benevolent disposition, which is manifested in those which we call acts of clemency and mercy.

This I take to be the true notion of the divine justice, setting it in the most amiable light, and representing him as what he truly is, *the best of beings*. Nor does it give the least encouragement to sin by diminishing our apprehensions of its penal effects. For surely it does not alter the nature of punishment or abate its severity, to say that goodness requires it: but our judge must appear to us the more venerable, when we consider him as not depriving any one being of the happiness it is capable of, but for a greater and more general good. To explain the exercise of this attribute otherwise, and represent it as ultimately intending the *honour* of God, of his *majesty*, and *authority*, as the end of his administration, distinct from, and superior to the greatest good of intelligent beings,---This is to render it less intelligible, and less agreeable to the best sentiments of our minds. For they must esteem that government the most excellent

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cellent and perfect, which pursues the most public happiness as its last end, and not the glory of the sovereign, as an interest different and separated from it. But however that may be, and supposing that *justice* and *goodness* are to be considered as distinct attributes of the Deity, yet still they are inseparably joined together in his perfect moral character, and their interests never interfere, nor are they exercised inconsistently. Divine justice is not so rigorous as to demand any thing contrary to goodness; nor is goodness so indulgent as to require any thing which justice does not allow, no more than infinite power and wisdom towards each other. And it must be remembered, that we have a clear and distinct idea of justice as well as of goodness, and of certain invariable measures to be always observed in the exercise of it; otherwise it can be of no use to the purposes of religion, and regulating our moral conduct with a respect to God. How can we either love or fear, hope in, or avoid being obnoxious to the justice of God, and how can we imitate it in our behaviour towards our fellow-creatures, unless we know what it is, and by what rule it proceeds? We are sure that the supreme, righteous, and wise ruler of the world, will preserve inviolable that order which he has established; that he will constantly and uniformly act according to his approbation of moral goodness in his rational creatures, and his disapprobation of the contrary. Though he may not during their trial so remarkably interpose as a judge, in rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked; yet he has given all men sufficient reason to believe that it shall be so, some way, and at some time or other, and to many has declared expressly, that there is a time appointed in which *he will judge the world in righteousness*. All this being clearly and distinctly apprehended by us, the divine justice is a proper and a determinate object of our esteem, reverence and fear. It adds great force to the eternal laws which are given to men,

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written upon their hearts, to be the rule of their actions; and is of great use as a glorious pattern to all mankind, whereby their common happiness would be most effectually secured. But if we do not know what the justice of God is; only have this confused general notion, that it is a high transcendent excellence of his nature which we cannot comprehend, nor understand how it will be manifested, and what measures in his final distribution to moral agents the supreme ruler will observe,---What influence can this have on our tempers or behaviour?

From what has been said, it plainly appears, that God is, and necessarily must be just, or that justice inseparably belongs to his character, and is an essential perfection of his nature. If it be included in goodness, as it seems to be, the same arguments which prove him to be good prove him also to be just. Indeed it cannot be supposed with any pretence of reason, that those two qualities are separable in any wise agent. If he is good, and disposed to promote the happiness of others as far as possibly he can, his understanding must be very defective not to know that the impartial distribution of justice is the most effectual means of securing the peace, and the happiness of societies. On the other hand, if he is thoroughly and universally righteous, he must be good; for without *goodness*, what is called *justice*, degenerates into tyranny. 'Tis true, there may be supposed a difference between a *righteous* and a *good* man; but in that supposition the former is a very imperfect character, and therefore the distinction cannot take place in the Deity, whose attributes *moral*, as well as *natural*, are all absolutely perfect. But it was never supposed, or can be supposed, that a man can be good with any tolerable degree of understanding, without being at the same time righteous: the connexion is so apparent between righteousness and the most universal happiness of rational beings, which is the supreme object of goodness.

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But if we should allow all the distinction between justice and goodness which can be allowed with any pretence of reason, still we have certain evidence that God is a just being. It must be acknowledged; otherwise all religion and virtue are no more than insignificant words: it must be acknowledged, I say, that there is a real and essential difference between right and wrong, or moral good and evil. The sense of this is so deeply engraven on our hearts, that it is impossible for us not to discern it; and not to esteem the intelligent being who acts according to that difference, and disapprove the contrary character. Is it then possible for us to doubt whether the most perfect of all intelligent beings is just or unjust? Whether he, who discerns all things, and all their differences and relations, *sees* that *right* is preferable, and in itself more excellent than *wrong*, and will act accordingly? Is it possible for us, when any moral agent deviates from the rule of righteousness, not to impute it either to a defect of understanding or of power, or to some corrupt affection? But none of these causes of error can be imagined to affect the supreme Being, perfect in knowledge, infinite in power, and incapable of being misled by any temptation. He has no interest of his own to serve by iniquity; his authority is derived from no superior, nor is he accountable to any. Of whom can he be *afraid* that *he should pervert judgment*, or whom can he be studious to please, that he should be biased by partial affection, since all are equally his creatures and subject to his disposal? He has laid us under the strictest obligations to righteousness, how then can we imagine that he is unrighteous himself? To this purpose is the reasoning of *Elibu*, on the subject of divine justice, and it seems to have great force,----† *Who hath given him a charge over the earth, or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man; if he gather unto himself*

† Job xxxiv. 13, 14, 15, 17, 18.

his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. Shall even he that hateth right govern; and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a King thou art wicked, and to Princes ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of Princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor, for they all are the work of his hands? I come in the

Second place, to shew more particularly, in what instances the divine justice is exercised. And here we must consider the true character of the Deity, which is that of the supreme moral governor of the world. Supposing the idea of justice in general to be settled, that it is rendering to all their due, the practice of it must be different, according to the different relations and conditions of the persons between whom it takes place. It requires a man to preserve inviolated the rights of another man over which he has no authority; to render a suitable recompence for services; to fulfil contracts, and to make restitution for wrongs. But the righteousness of a ruler consists in distributing to all subjects rewards and punishments, according to the known, at least sufficiently promulged laws of the society. And the righteousness of God, who can be considered in no other capacity than that of the supreme universal ruler of all moral agents, consists in rendering to them according to their works, including their affections, intentions, motives, and every circumstance necessary to a true estimate of their moral rectitude or evil, which are all perfectly known to him.

In the divine administration, which comprehends the whole extent of created existence and the entire series of events, there is a visible relation between life and the course of inanimate nature: The latter being so directed as to answer the purposes of the other, by impressions on its organs of perception, and by exciting its active powers, so that there is apparent œconomy

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nomy in the conduct of the animal state ; and superintending providence by the discipline of pleasure and pain arising from sensible objects, determines living creatures to pursue the ends for which they were made. But in the government of moral agents, whose life is capable of great variety, as well as superior kinds, of enjoyment, and of opposite unhappiness ; the like discipline being applied to higher purposes, that is, pleasure being connected with virtue, and pain with moral evil, obtains the character of righteous. Upon this view, we may consider as included in the exercise of divine justice, all instances in which, (whether by extraordinary interposition, or by the establishment of nature in its ordinary course,) providence testifies an approbation of moral rectitude, causing natural good to follow it, and disapprobation of vice and iniquity, by making pain of any kind the consequence of it. But these are so various that they cannot be enumerated. Not to mention *surprising events*, (which have been before observed to carry in the judgment of all men, (who own a superintending providence,) the visible marks of rewards and punishment,) there are undeniable tendencies and effects in the ordinary administration, and resulting from the present constitution of things, which favour virtue and discountenance wickedness. Who, that attentively considers the general condition of mankind in this world, can question the truth of *Solomon's* observation,---* *That length of days is in the right hand of wisdom, or religious virtue, and in her left hand are riches and honour.* Temperance, industry, and the social virtues, are naturally productive of health, reputation, and riches, which contribute to the long and easy enjoyment of life ; whereas sickness, poverty, infamy, and sometimes untimely death, are the apparent effects of luxury, idleness, fraud, and violence. If there is an intelligent being at the head of nature, who guides all the notions and operations of inferior causes ; who framed the human constitution, and preserves its powers in

* Prov. iii. 16.

their natural exercise; who formed men into societies, inducing them with social dispositions, and directing the exertion of them to their proper ends; can it be doubted but he is a friend to virtue, and an adversary to moral evil? Or that these are indications of *righteousness*, as the character of his government? Again, if we look into the interior part of the human frame, and observe how its powers operate, considering it as the workmanship of God, we shall see yet clearer manifestations of his justice, in the stricter and more necessary connection which there is between virtue and pleasure, and between moral evil and pain. No sooner we are conscious of any good affection exerting itself, than a pleasing sensation arises in the self-approving mind, even before the completed virtuous action, which increases the pleasure, because the good affection then has its full effect. On the other hand, inward shame, and self-tormenting reflections necessarily accompany a consciousness of immoral dispositions, and grow with them in every step of their progress, and all their bad effects. For proof of this, the proper appeal is to experience, and every man's heart will witness to him that it is true, unless a long course of profligate wickedness has destroyed his natural sense of right and wrong; in which case human nature is visibly depraved and lost to all rational self-enjoyment. The ways therefore of *wisdom* are, by the unalterable appointment of God, *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*: The contrary, are ways of sorrow and misery. And here is a farther instance of a just moral government in nature, or of the divine righteousness, adding a sanction of rewards and punishments which executes itself, to the law which is written in the hearts of men.

But still it must be acknowledged, that tho' these are instances of the divine justice, and particular methods by which it is exercised, yet it is not fully manifested in them. The observations which have been made on the common course of providence do not hold

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universally; the best men are not always the most prosperous in the world, tho' virtue tends to prosperity. Sickness, poverty, and reproach happen often to the good and to the bad promiscuously; nay sometimes true religion is the very cause of grievous suffering from the hands of wicked men. And even what may more properly be called the sanction of the law of nature, the inward satisfaction and peace which accompanies a consciousness of virtuous integrity as its reward, and the anguish which attends men's self-accusing thoughts as the present punishment of their sins, even this does not appear as one would expect the result of a judicial proceeding should do. It rises and falls, not always in exact proportion to merit and demerit; but men have it in their power to make it more or less sensibly felt. Sometimes good men thro' their own weakness and inattention, have not all the enjoyment of their own sincerity which they might have; and bad men, by increasing their wickedness, harden themselves into an insensibility, and lessen the feeling of their own sufferings for it. We must therefore conclude, that the present state of this world, tho' it is not without strong intimations of the divine justice, yet it is not the proper scene for that attribute to display itself fully in; and that God has appointed a future time wherein he will judge men, and all other moral agents, in righteousness, rendering to them all according to their works.

From what has been last observed, we have a satisfactory answer to the objections which are commonly made against the equity of the divine government. Some dispensations of providence carry at first view an appearance of being favourable to the wickedness of men, and of severity against true piety and virtue. The covetous, and ambitious prosper in wicked devices for increasing their wealth and power by methods of deceit and cruelty; while the innocent are caught in their snares, and fall a prey to them: Sometimes the most eminently virtuous are the most bar-

barously used. The answer to all which is, that we ought not to make a judgment concerning the divine administration by single *unconnected* events; for it is an intire scheme comprehending the whole series of events. And therefore, as in other obvious cases, a system is not rightly understood, nor a true judgment pronounced upon it merely by seeing and considering its unrelated parts, but by discerning their mutual relations; so to a right judgment of this moral scheme, it would be necessary to see the remotest issue of things comprehended in it, which being above the reach of human understanding, particular dispensations, (which are only parts of the great design,) must be but very imperfectly understood by us, and it would be extremely rash to pronounce them inconsistent with wisdom, equity, and goodness. We know by experience, that some events which at first were shocking, and seemed to be very grievous, have afterwards appeared in a quite different light, not only just, but wisely meant for good. We may well suppose it to be so in other cases, to the end of which our knowledge does not reach. But when the mystery of God shall be finished, when the great plan of his providence shall have its full accomplishment, then, and not till then, shall the divine moral attributes be perfectly vindicated, to the conviction of all rational beings; all difficulties relating to this subject cleared up, and the objections silenced which short-sighted mortals now make, but which really have no other foundation than in their own ignorance; at present the ways of God are to us *unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out*. This however we know, and it ought to satisfy us, that since there are plain discoveries of a ruling intelligence in the universe which formed and disposes all things in it; since the supreme Being is the natural governor of all his creatures, and the moral governor of all rational agents; since from the constitution of our own nature, and by convincing arguments drawn even from the present

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sent administration, it appears that he is on the side of virtue, and that he is just and good; since these things are so, his justice shall *finally*, and in the *whole*, be fully manifested for the good of his creation. Let us, next, suppose that mankind are now in a state of probation, (which is a supposition in all respects worthy of the wisdom of God, and not inconsistent with any of his perfections, and we have great reason to believe it is fact,) when we consider the weakness and imperfection of the human capacity, both intellectual and moral, and the surprising improvement it makes by due application and exercise, (which depends principally on the mind itself,) and when we consider the circumstances of our state exactly fitted to the design of trying us, and giving the opportunities of making progress in knowledge and virtue;—Allowing this supposition, I say, it is evident that the appearances of our present condition are just such as they ought, or as in reason they could be expected to be. That is, it was not reasonable to think that divine providence should interpose any otherwise than it now actually does, not by dispensing to all men enjoyment and happiness of all kinds, or pain and misery in exact proportion to the good and evil of their dispositions and behaviour, (for then their state would not be probationary;) but by affording them sufficient means of virtue, yet leaving them at liberty to use them or not, or giving strong intimations, but not an intuitive knowledge such as should necessitate their assent or attention, that God is a lover of moral rectitude in his creatures, and will support its interest. If it be so, and the principles before-mentioned be true, the consequence, I think, is very plain, that God will distribute rewards and punishments to every one of mankind; and the justice of his government requires him to do so.

This is all the length that our *unassisted* reason can carry us in the knowledge of a *future* divine retribution.

In what manner, at what time, and with what solemnity God will *judge the world in righteousness*, must be unknown to us without a revelation: And so must the nature and circumstances of that state to which men shall be adjudged; any farther than that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked, or that in general, the former shall be happy, and the other unhappy. As the human mind is naturally capable of great variety in its condition, and of passing thro' (and we have reason to believe, nay certainly that it actually does pass thro') several stages of existence; during it's continuance in one stage, the knowledge it has of another is very imperfect. Some have imagined that the appearances of our present situation could not be accounted for any other way so well, as by the supposing a pre-existence of our souls, and those appearances to be the consequences of their behaviour in that state. But this is only conjecture, the supposition appears to reason possible, and but barely so. We have a very familiar instance, known to every one, of an important change in the state of the mind, tho' it is only a gradual and progressive change, that is, from infancy to mature age. How different are the notions, the exercises, and enjoyments of a child, and a grown man? And how imperfect are the views which the mind in its first mature condition, has of manly, that is, of rational and virtuous employments and pleasures? Like this is the difference (and so *St. Paul*, very fitly makes the comparison †) between the present and future state, with respect to the sentiments and improvements of the mind, tho' the essential powers are the same, and will remain for ever; and it is but a very imperfect notion we have *now*, of what we our selves shall be *hereafter*. We think, and reason, and speak but like children concerning the affairs and entertainments of that vastly superior life to come, in comparison with which the present is only an infancy of being. This however, which is directly to the present purpose,

† 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

pose, we must conclude, and our idea of the divine justice necessarily leads to it, that the condition of every particular person shall be according to his works or moral improvement in the probation-state, without excepting one individual, and without regard to any other consideration. And not only so in general, but the measure or degree of future happiness shall bear an exact proportion to the degree of virtue attained in this world; and the measure of punishments will bear an exact proportion to the degree of moral evil in the temper and practice of men here; and in other words, the last and decisive judgment of God, and every particular sentence pronounced by him, will be impartial and equitable. Both these characters are included in the very notion of justice, and must be understood to be meant when we attribute that perfection to the Deity. *Impartiality* is so essential to righteousness in judicature, that *respect of persons* is the very thing meant by corrupting or perverting judgment. And for *equity*, (consisting in the proportion of degrees determined by the sentence of a judge, between merit and rewards, and between guilt and punishment,) this is so far implied in the idea of justice, that every instance of deviation from it must be imputed to a defect of that quality, or else to a defect of wisdom or power. Now it is certain, that with God there can be no partiality. For as all creatures originally derive their being from him, every capacity in their nature, and every good in their condition is his gift, there could be no regard to one more than another. And thro' all the periods of their duration nothing can be done by any of them, no use made of the powers he bestowed on them, which can alter his dispositions and purposes towards them: None indeed which can please him except the improvement of those powers to the proper ends appointed by himself, that is, nothing which can mislead him from the rule of right or absolute impartiality, and no causes can be imagin'd which render the divine judicial proceedings unequal or deficient

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in the proportion of justice. For as he has no unequal partial affection towards his creatures, and there can be no suspicion of his departing from unbiass'd integrity, so it is impossible any the least circumstance which enters into the merit of moral actions, should be hid from his understanding; or that he should not exactly discern the precise degree of goodness or evil which is in them. And in the whole moral state of every individual agent it is equally absurd to suppose, that his adjudging and effectually applying a proportionable reward or a proportionable degree of punishment, should be hindered thro' his own impotence, or by the resistance of any opposite power.

Let us now consider what is the proper application to be made of this important principle both of natural and revealed religion. First; as the final issues of the divine judgment are of all events the most momentous to us, (for it ascertains our greatest happiness or misery, so as no power can prevent it, no wisdom can provide against it) this doctrine teaching us by what rule that judgment will proceed, and what measures will be observed in it, at the same time teaches us how to form our expectations from it. Men are naturally anxious about their condition hereafter; nothing can afford greater contentment to their minds at present, than the well grounded hope of future happiness; but how is that to be attained? Our state is to be determined by the sentence of a righteous judge, according as our works are good or bad. And therefore it must be the greatest vanity, and the highest presumption, for men to expect happiness hereafter, whose hearts accuse them of wickedness deliberately committed and obstinately continued in. Surely the state of that creature must be very desperate, and very deplorable, whose hope depends on the Almighty's *perverting* judgment in its favour. But men deceive themselves by fondly imagining that something *else* will be accepted instead of integrity of heart and purity of hands; that an external denomination, a religious profession, a partial obedience, or a purpose of fu-

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future amendment, will recommend them to the favour of God, which is really to suppose that he is not a righteous judge.

On the other hand, the man whose heart does not condemn him has confidence towards God, because he is a perfectly just governor, by whom no service sincerely performed to him, nor instance of respect to his commandments, will ever be forgotten. Unless this were known to be the character of the judge, and that the measures of righteousness will be observed by him in judgment, no man could have any rational confidence. He might take his chance in a capricious administration; but the only foundation of reasonable hope is, that distribution will be made with impartial equity. It is certainly becoming frail creatures, and whose hearts accuse them of many moral defects, to stand in awe of the divine justice; and, as *St. Peter* exhorts, *to pass the time of their sojourning in fear, if they call on the father who without respect of persons judgeth all men* *. But still a self-approving mind is naturally secure, supported by this persuasion, that right shall finally prevail in the universe; and therefore looks forward, without consternation, to the last result of things, when all irregularities shall be rectified, when the proud shall be no more prosperous, nor innocence oppressed, but all men shall receive according to their deeds done in the body, and not according to their outward actions only, but the prevalent affections and purposes of their hearts; for ‡ *every secret thing shall be brought into judgment, whether it be good or bad*.

Secondly, The consideration of God's justice to be finally manifested in appointing the condition of all men according to their works, should teach us patience under the difficulties of our present state. Though the ways of providence are now involved in obscurity which is impenetrable to human knowledge, and in our broken view of its all-wise proceedings some events have an appearance quite contrary to righteousness,

* Eph. i. 17.

‡ Eccl. xii. 14.

ness, the last judgment will set all these seeming inequalities right. And to them who endure persecution for conscience sake, this is a great support of patience, that it is, as St Paul speaks *, *a righteous thing with God to recompence tribulation to those who trouble them; and to them who are troubled a final happy rest, when they shall be glorified in the salvation of his saints, and take vengeance on them who knew him not, nor obeyed his laws.* It is often grievous to good men, that their characters, (which may be numbered among their most important interests in this world,) suffer by wrong human judgment, both in the forms of public authority and private censure. But there lies an appeal to a superior righteous tribunal; and with minds supported by a consciousness of their own sincerity, it may well be accounted a very small thing † *to be judged by men,* seeing he that finally judgeth is the supreme, infallible, and just Lord. This consideration however, should prevent the rash judgments of men; should make them cautious in their proceedings even where they have a right to judge; and restrain the liberties they too often take of reproaching their neighbours; especially of judging the motives and intentions of their hearts, which is God's prerogative, for he only ‡ *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, that every one may have that praise and recompence which is justly due to him.*

Thirdly, God in his justice, as well as his other moral perfections, is the best example for us to imitate, as far as the frailty of our nature will allow. It is our glory as reasonable creatures to be capable of imitating him; and as our consciences bear as full testimony to the rectitude of this as to any other part of his law written in our hearts, we must be self-condemned, and therefore unhappy, in acting contrary to it. It is true, our fellow-creatures have demands of right upon us which no other beings can have upon the almighty maker of all things; and there-

* 2 Thess. i. 6 † 1 Cor. iv. 3. ‡ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

therefore our satisfying those demands, is a doing justice which cannot properly be called an imitation of him. But since there is an apparent equity resulting from the relations of persons and things, to which the supreme Ruler has a regard in his administration, this is a strong motive to our governing our conduct by a regard to the same equity, even where our condition being essentially different, our acts of justice are no way parallel to his. And especially, the exercise of human authority should, as exactly as possible, follow the pattern of that perfect righteousness which governs the world. Princes are called Gods upon earth, their power duly exercised being the nearest resemblance of the divine universal dominion. But if their power degenerates into tyranny, if under the colour of authority they oppress their fellow-creatures, they are then guilty, not only of the greatest injustice to men, but the highest dishonour to God the fountain of all lawful authority, * *by whom kings reign righteously and princes decree justice*, and to whom human usurpations, the perverting of judgment, and violence, are no otherwise to be attributed, than the most malicious acts of the wickedest beings, the devils themselves: that is, they are permitted by his providence for the trial of men's virtues, or for the punishment of their transgressions. Since he who is the absolute sovereign of the whole world, accountable to none, never acts arbitrarily in the government of his creatures, but always with perfect equity, how dare ambitious mortals, (who † *shall die like men, and fall like the tyrannical princes* which have gone before them,) enslave and oppress their fellow-mortals, who in the main privileges of human nature are equal with them, and shall stand upon a level with them before the supreme tribunal? Shall they govern by arbitrary will, or by caprice and passion, instead of justice? Surely such encroachments on the rights of humanity, which are under his protection, and such in-

* Prov. viii. 15.

† Psal. lxxxii. 7.

dignity to his own government, cries aloud to the righteous God for vengeance; and to resist its destructive exorbitances by reason, and force under the conduct of reason, is not only justified but laudable, nay strictly required by the principle of piety towards God, as well as benevolence to mankind. I have now finished my intended explication of the divine moral attributes. They might, indeed, have been considered much more largely, and distinguished into a greater variety. Mercy, and grace, and patience, are sometimes represented, (and very usefully,) to practical purposes, as distinct perfections of the Deity. But if we consider them as properties of the divine nature, analogous to the different springs of moral action in the human mind, (which is the only way we have of forming our most accurate notions concerning them,) it is plain those last mentioned, are really the same, diversified only by the manner of exercise or manifestation, and by the condition of the objects. The *grace* of God is, his *favour* to the undeserving, to reasonable creatures who were obnoxious to his displeasure by their offences; or favour manifested beyond what they could have had any assurance of according to the original discovery of his will, and terms of their acceptance. To his *goodness* they owe their being, the continuance of it, and whatever happiness they possess or hope for. But as their reason must teach them to expect future blessings from him upon the condition of sincere and persevering obedience to the law of their nature, a sense of guilt shakes the foundations of their confidence. In this case favour continued or offered, is *grace*; for that supposes the object to be both sinful and miserable to such a degree as greatly to magnify the compassion which interposes for its relief. And the *patience* of God, is the lenity of his government manifested in his suspending the execution of judgment, that sinners may have the opportunity of repentance, thereby to prevent their destruction. But in all this variety of operation, the principle

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principle is the same, *divine benevolence*; which shines the more gloriously (because it appears most pure and disinterested) in the miseries and distresses, the guilt and obstinacy, of the creatures towards whom it is exercised.

In like manner the *truth of God* in the moral sense, (comprehending veracity or sincerity in his communication with other intelligent beings so as not to deceive them, and fidelity in fulfilling his promises,) this does not appear strictly speaking to be a distinct attribute. Indeed as veracity is to the human mind a beautiful moral object, (we cannot but approve it, and disapprove the contrary as odious and deformed,) it is very natural to ascribe it to the Deity as a branch of his perfect moral character; which is not to be understood in this sense, that in all the knowledge we derive from him, (and it is all the knowledge we have,) things are still represented as they really are in themselves, and as he sees them. The contrary is evident. The ideas we have by our external senses, (of which God is the original author,) are not complete representations of the nature of material objects; nor do our faculties seem to be fitted for comprehending the essences of any beings; and consequently, the knowledge which God communicates does not reach so far. But it is obvious, that *sincerity* does not require any person to make known to others all the truth which he himself knows; (it were impossible that an infinitely intelligent being should do it;) but only to discover the truth which they have a right to know in pursuance of their mutual relation, or to prevent their falling into errors which may be hurtful to them. Now God can be under no previous obligation to his creatures. All the good they possess, and the farther good they hope for, proceeds solely from his bounty; and therefore their reasonable expectations that he will not mislead them to their hurt, or so as to frustrate the design of his own beneficence, however just these expectations

be, (and indeed they are more just and certain than those which are founded on the demands of strictest right from their fellow-creatures,) yet they really have no other foundation than this, that his favour will be manifested to such beings consistently and uniformly, in carrying on his original kind intentions concerning them: In other words, the truth of God is nothing else but his goodness exercised towards intelligent beings of imperfect understandings, in a way suitable to their nature and condition. After the same manner must be understood that other branch of his truth, *faithfulness*; which really means no more than the immutability of his goodness, or else it may be considered as included in justice. So fidelity is commonly understood as included in the righteousness of men; and according to either of these views, it is comprehended in the divine attributes already explained.

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DISCOURSE XI.

The Love of God explained and recommended.

[A B E R N E T H Y.]

MATTHEW xxii. 37.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind.

I F we have clear and satisfying evidence of the being of God, of his perfections natural and moral, of his having created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things which are in them, and of his providence preserving them all, disposing the whole series of events in them with the most perfect wisdom, and for the greatest good, we can scarcely avoid this important inquiry, What regards are due to him from us his reasonable creatures? By looking into our minds we will perceive that they are differently affected with the objects that are presented to them; some excite desire, some joy, and others horror and aversion, and these different affections to different objects are subdivided into various kinds. Though they come under the same common denomination of desire and aversion, yet the inward perceptions of them have very little affinity with each other; for example, the desire of meat and the desire of virtue.

the aversion to bodily pain, and the aversion to moral turpitude. But whatever variety there is in them, they all originally belong to our nature, and result from our constitution, we cannot make and we cannot destroy them. It may be in our power, by an habitual attention to some objects, to strengthen the affections of the mind to them, and by diverting their attention from other objects, to weaken its affection to them, whereby the one obtains a prevalence over the other, forming our temper and engaging our pursuit: But the original affections themselves are constituted by nature the same and invariable, no more in the power of the mind, and dependent on its choice, as to their being or not being, than simple ideas are. Here we shall find ourselves obliged to rest. As the materials of our knowledge are limited, the imagination and the understanding may variously compound, associate, and distinguish them, but can create us no new ones, so are our affections. When any object is proposed to the perceiving faculty, (perhaps before it is proposed, as in the case of bodily appetites,) whether it be by sense, by reflection, or in whatever manner, a certain propension towards it naturally arises, which we cannot hinder, nor alter, nor transfer to a different kind of objects. For instance, the desire of food prevents any reasoning, deliberation, or choice, and we cannot possibly excite it to any other object: There is an approbation and esteem of moral excellence, as natural to the human soul, which we cannot apply to any thing which is not apprehended to be moral excellence: And the same may be said concerning all our other affections, the objects are limited, and the movements of the mind towards them depend solely on the constitution of our nature. It is in vain therefore to call in the assistance of foreign motives, such as those taken from interest, from the hope of happiness, or the fear of misery: These may strongly affect the mind, and operate on the springs of action, producing an earnest pursuit,

pursuit, but the discerned qualities of objects themselves can only excite affections to them. A man may be convinced that it is for his interest to have a particular affection; but this cannot immediately produce it, nor have any other effect towards it, than to engage his earnest attention to the object till the exciting qualities are apprehended; and as soon as they appear, the affection naturally arises of itself.

It is farther to be observed, that as objects are introduced into the mind by various ways, some by sense, and others by reflection, at the first discernment of certain material beings there is raised a desire or aversion to them: And by attending to the voluntary operations of our minds, and to the external actions of other moral agents, (the evidence of their inward dispositions,) nay to imaginary characters considered under the distinction of morally right and wrong, there arise directly opposite affections, the difference of which we see as plainly and necessarily as we do the difference between desire and aversion to sensible things. All these equally belong to our nature, but are not of equal importance to the principal ends of it. Hunger and thirst are the appetites of man; bodily pleasure and pain are his natural sensations, of which he cannot divest himself, but when he deliberately attends to honesty, benevolence, and fidelity, an affection to these qualities is as natural to him, and a dislike of the contrary. To confine real affections to the objects of sense, and treat all others as imaginary, must proceed from the most stupid inconsideration. We know with the greatest certainty, (because we are intimately conscious of it,) that something exists which cannot be perceived by our eyes, nor ears, nor any other corporeal organs, which is the object of our most intense love: We know that we have as distinct ideas of reason, wisdom, order, goodness, and justice, as of any sensible qualities; and that they as really affect our minds, tho' in a different manner; and that as these kinds of ideas are

the principal subjects of our speculation, so our principal happiness depends upon them, indeed without them humanity would be degraded to a level with the brutal nature, and its enjoyments confined within a very narrow circle. Now if there are other beings, (not perceived by the external senses, but whose existence is fully proved,) to whom intellectual and moral qualities or perfections belong, which qualities in the degree wherein we discern them are highly esteemed by us, and the matter of our enjoyment; These beings are also the objects of affections which are natural to the human mind: Especially the most excellent of all beings, who is absolutely perfect in knowledge, wisdom, rectitude, and goodness, justly challenges our highest esteem and most affectionate regards. Nay, they will naturally and ultimately, of their own accord, terminate upon him, if we have a firm persuasion of his being, and of those his attributes, and if we carefully attend to them. Perhaps some men having first formed their idea of love by, and accustoming themselves to appropriate the word to that emotion or passion they feel, and which they call love towards other subjects, have but a confused notion of the love of God, and even think it mere enthusiasm. But let us seriously consider the several obvious characters of the Deity, as they are manifested to us by his works, and observe the impressions they make and cannot but make on a calm unprejudiced mind, we shall then understand the affections to him which naturally arise in every human heart not sunk in stupid insensibility and viciousness, and which are comprehended in this sum of piety, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.*

First, The mind of man cannot avoid distinguishing in things which are presented to it, between beauty and deformity, regularity and confusion, being pleased with the one, and displeased with the other. A careful

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ful attention improves this sense, and makes the difference more discernible and more affecting, but it has a foundation in nature. Scarcely any one is so ignorant and so unaccustomed to observe the diversity of forms, as not to see a superior excellence in some above others, consisting in order, proportion, and harmony; and to men of more enlarged understanding, and a more exquisite taste, the love of such beauty rises to a greater height, and gives a pleasure far exceeding all sensual gratifications. Whence does this proceed? And to what cause shall it be attributed? Surely it proceeds from our frame, and we are so constituted by nature; but yet if we observe how such beauty strikes our minds, we shall perceive in it a reference to an original, a designing intelligence, which produced it, and which is apprehended to be more excellent. When a man views attentively any curious production of human art, immediately it occurs to his thoughts, that this is not the effect of chance, which can never be the cause of order, nor give any pleasure to the mind, but that it is the result of contrivance; and it is his discerning the characters of understanding in the exact adjustment of the several parts, with their various relations, and the harmony of the whole, that gives him the agreeable entertainment. Without this, if there be any affection excited, it is but low, of a quite different kind from that which we are now considering, and still in proportion as the marks of wisdom are discovered in any work, so is our sense of its beauty and the pleasure of contemplating it. The materials are capable of any form, the most disagreeable as well as the most pleasing, and they are never apprehended to have formed themselves, it is the disposing intelligence which attracts the affection, and gives delight.

If from the low efforts of human skill and genius we take our rise to the works of nature, we shall see vastly more exquisite beauty, a more exact proportion, and perfect uniformity, amidst an infinitely

greater variety of parts. Take any piece of inanimate nature diversified as we see it, the visible heavens, the wide seas, huge tracts of mountains, large forests, or any other which fills the sight ;---These strike the contemplative mind with a delightful sensation, abstracting from all regard to the usefulness of them ; but if we examine the sensations narrowly, it will appear to arise from the discerned regularity of the object, in other words, the manifestation of wise design in framing it. Add these works one to another, considering at the same time their mutual relations, (the everlasting hills settled on their unmoveable foundations) the tall trees waving their slender tops in the fluid air, and sheltering a multitude of feeble inhabitants, yet safe ; the valleys overspread with herbage and corn, for the sustenance of man and beast ; the vast ocean circumscribed by limits, which its waves in the greatest fury of them cannot pass over ; the celestial orbs preserving their original distances from, and shedding upon earth their benign influences ;) in this view the idea of order grows upon us, that is of grand design, which is the just and the natural object of affectionate admiration. But all this is only an imperfect sketch of that stupendous fabric, the universe, in every part of which, that falls under our observation, the same regularity appears, and a perfect harmony in the whole. If we descend to a particular survey of nature's works, the variety is surprising ; the curious frame of every individual is astonishing ; and the convenient disposal of them all, is amazing. What a numberless multitude of living forms do we behold on this earth itself, the very lowest of them inimitable by art, the structure of each so nice that no human understanding can discern, nor penetrate into the secret springs of its movements, and all so properly placed as to have the best means of preservation, and a full opportunity of exerting their vital powers ? If we carry our inquiries into the extent of created existence, beyond the reach of sense,

the modern improvements which have been made in speculative knowledge will lead our reason to apprehend worlds above worlds, the limits of which we cannot so much as conjecture, and where the like order prevails as in our globe. So that the effect surpasses our imagination, much more the cause. Yet still the affection is a real natural affection, and the object is a really existing object, though incomprehensible. For let any man deny if he can, that his mind loves and is pleased with order, as the effect of wise design; and the more exact the order is, and the more comprehensive the design, the greater pleasure it yields, and the higher esteem it raises of the author. Nor shall I endeavour to prove, but suppose it as what you are fully convinced of, that there is one supreme, eternal, all-comprehending mind, the fountain of being, and parent of the universe, who stretched out the heavens by his wisdom, and established the earth by his discretion; the original source of all beauty, harmony, and wisdom; and therefore the adequate object of our highest esteem and affection.

The intellectual and moral world contains a yet more wonderful and glorious display of the divine wisdom, than the corporeal system and the animal kingdom. A multitude of derived and dependent beings, indued with understanding and self-determining powers, the image of the author's self-original spiritual nature and attributes, each a distinct conscious self, possessed of a dignity and perfection which we cannot help thinking superior to the whole of inanimate nature, all disposed of in the best manner, the most suitable to their capacities, and united in one society by the common bond of benevolence, every individual directed by the instincts of its nature, so far as a voluntary agent in such circumstances could be so directed, to promote the common good,—How glorious is this great family in heaven and earth, under a wise and beautiful oeconomy, all cared for by the providence of its father! How amiable is he! I do not speak of

moral qualities, and dispositions in them, (a faint similitude of his perfect moral character, which is the object of another affection,) but considering the whole system of rational creatures placed in such order as they are, and under an administration suitable to their nature, it appears to be an amazing production of power, and a wonderful manifestation of wisdom; which perfections concurring in one agent are the objects of our esteem and reverence in the degree wherein they are discerned. And as it is in contemplating the fabric of the material world, our idea of the creator's understanding and greatness, and our admiration rises in proportion to our knowledge of his work; the more accurately we examine its parts, and the farther we enlarge our considerations of its unmeasurable magnitude, the more curious and the more magnificent it appears; so it is here. If we study the constitution of a single intelligent creature, its various powers and affections as they are related to each other, and all harmoniously conspiring to answer the ends of its being, it is an astonishing contrivance. And if we consider the diversity of degrees in mental accomplishment which appear among the individuals of our own species, all under the direction of the father of lights; and the vastly more enlarged capacities with which superior orders, (we know not how many of them, nor with what distinctions,) are indued, all of them in different ways fulfilling the law of their creation, and having different enjoyment suitable to their several capacities;--Who can think of the great author without admiration, or forbear praising him with the most affectionate esteem?

Lastly, If we consider all these works, each of them apart so marvellous, their number incomprehensible, their extent prodigious, their order so exquisite, all, I say, derived from one mind, a single agent, how wonderful is he! All the beauties shared among the numberless beings in heaven and earth, and the harmony of the whole, are the effects of his skill and contrivance;

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trivance ; and all the scattered rays of understanding which in different degrees are to be found in the several orders of intelligent creatures, are emanations from this one pure eternal fountain of intellectual light. Can the human heart be indifferent to such a being ? No surely ; the attentive unprejudiced mind will find a respect to him arise in it which is unparallel'd in the whole compass of its affections, as the dignity and excellence of the object is without any parallel. The objects which are limited, and which it can thoroughly comprehend, are not adequate to its aspiring desires, it still seeks something beyond them ; but it loses itself delightfully in the contemplation of infinite incomprehensible excellence, (in the present case infinite wisdom,) which necessarily attracts the highest veneration of an intelligent nature.

Secondly, Another essential perfection of the Deity is goodness, which naturally appears to our minds amiable, and is the object of love in the strictest sense. Indeed without this, God himself could not be the complete object of our highest desires and most perfect enjoyment. For however venerable wisdom may appear, and the contemplation of it entertaining, it is not the only, nor the chief good of man : We have other affections which must have their suitable objects, and they appear in a different light from that of mere speculation, to make the mind happy. Of goodness we have a very distinct idea ; every man understands by it a disposition to communicate happiness. We are conscious of some degree of it in ourselves, and we are convinced of it in others by its genuine fruits ; but wherever it appears, and whenever the mind reflects upon it, it appears lovely, the object not only of approbation as some other qualities are, but of a strong affection. Let any man set against each other in his own thoughts these opposite characters, one benevolent and kind, ready to do good as far as it is in his power, and uniformly acting from that principle ; the other malicious, endeavouring the destruction and misery

misery of all within his reach, or even perfectly selfish, intent wholly on the pursuit of private enjoyment, without the least regard to the happiness of other beings, nay, distressing them in the greatest degree, and in their highest interests, if they stand in the way of his own satisfaction in any respect; and let him try if he can preserve a perfect indifference of heart towards these characters, without preferring the former to the latter. The truth is, they must be creatures otherwise made than we are, to whom disinterested goodness is not an object of love, and who find no pleasure in the contemplation of it.

I shall not insist on the evidences of God's goodness; they are the same with the evidences of his being. His works have the characters of beneficence as well as of power and wisdom; and a benevolent principle, as truly as eternal power and godhead, is an invisible excellence of his nature, which *from the creation of the world is clearly seen, being understood by the things which he has made.* What an amazing variety of enjoyment belongs to the sensitive and the rational life, all derived from the divine bounty? How wonderfully is dead nature accommodated to the uses of living things? And as the supreme Being, the creator of the world, has filled it with the fruits of his liberality, that which raises our idea of this principle in him as an object of affection, is, the freeness and disinterestedness of it. Every inferior agent depending on another for the preservation of his being and for his happiness, must be supposed to need something from without, and to have particular desires which ultimately terminate in himself. But how can we conceive of any other spring of action than benevolence in the absolutely self-sufficient and independent being? There is therefore none good but one, that is God, none essentially and immutably good, none besides him who acts always solely from that principle. Here is goodness in perfection, which must appear amiable to every mind that bears any re-

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semblance of it and be the subject of delightful meditation.

If these are our apprehensions concerning the Deity, one can hardly conceive what should stop the course of our love to him. It is true, there are other parts of his character, (to be afterwards observed,) which when compared with our own, may damp our hopes from him, and produce fear. But since even imperfect kind dispositions necessarily attract our affection, the idea of perfect supreme goodness, (abstracting from all other considerations,) would seem to be an object which must have irresistible charms for the human heart; and that we should not be able to consider it without a sensible pleasure. It may therefore justly be feared, that as some men's habitual impressions of God, (particularly in their devotion,) have more of a joyless awe, and servile dread, than a delightful complacency, this proceeds from their misrepresenting him to themselves, as a being who acts towards his creatures merely in the way of arbitrary dominion, appointing them to happiness or misery only because he will. Whereas the true notion of infinite goodness, directed in its exercise by the most perfect wisdom, and having always for its object the greatest and most extensive happiness, would inspire the mind with sentiments of ingenuous gratitude, and thereby be the best security of our sincere obedience. At the same time, there is no reason to allege that the tendency of this is to encourage a presumptuous confidence in sinners, as imagining they may go on securely in their trespasses with hopes of impunity; (which can only proceed from a wretched depravity of heart, and a wrong notion of the divine goodness, as if it were a blind undistinguishing proneness to the communication of happiness;) for besides that every considerate person must see that supreme goodness itself has established an inviolable connexion between virtue and felicity, the true sense of that glorious

rious and amiable perfection, even naturally and immediately begets an inward shame and remorse for having dishonoured it, and some degree of hope is absolutely necessary to repentance.

But let us consider ourselves as the particular objects of the divine favour,---That whatever good we possess of any kind, whatever excellence we are conscious of in the frame of our nature, and its pre-eminence above other kinds of creatures in the world about us,---That largeness of understanding whereby we are entertained with an infinite diversity of objects,---Those natural affections which yield us a great variety of pleasure,---our moral capacities and improvement, which are accompanied with a high sense of worth, The privileges of our condition, That provision which is made for our easy enjoyment of life, whether by the means of our own invention and industry, and the assistance of our fellow-creatures or without them,---and The greater happiness we hope for hereafter,---All these and all other good things, however conveyed, are originally owing to the bounty of God. Now the affection of gratitude is so natural to the mind of man, that we shall scarcely allow him to be reckoned one of the species who is altogether void of it; at least, to be ungrateful is universally accounted one of the most abandoned and profligate characters. But surely this principle ought to operate most vigorously towards the greatest beneficence; and there is none that may be compared with that which God has shewn to us. Shall we be much affected with the kindness of our fellow-creatures, and disposed to make thankful acknowledgments for their favours? And shall we be insensible of that goodness to which we owe our being and our very capacity of happiness, as well as the materials of it? This is the noblest object of human affection, in which the mind, firmly persuaded and steddily contemplating it, rests fully satisfied. And though the exercise and manifestation of this

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divine principle towards ourselves, gives us the most convincing proof of it, and a very lively sense of its amiable excellence, yet does not the affection ultimately terminate in our own happiness, so that we should be justly said to love God for our own sakes, but in supreme Goodness itself, which must appear the most complete and worthy object of love to every intelligent and moral being whose judgment is not misled by prejudices or inattention, and which is not deeply corrupted in its moral affections.

Thirdly, we may consider the intire moral character of the Deity. All his moral attributes may be summed up in goodness, which is probably the justest way we can conceive of them as active principles in him. Perhaps in inferior characters benevolence may be rightly called the sum of virtue; but of the supreme independent being we cannot think more becomingly than that this solely is the spring of his actions. Yet considering the variety of its exercise according to the different condition of rational creatures, and how variously individuals are affected with those very measures which they steddily pursue as their great end (the universal good,) hence arises a diversity in our conceptions concerning that most simple uniform principle which is without variableness or shadow of turning. We know how to distinguish in imperfect human characters between the righteous and the good: the last is the finishing quality, yet others are necessary: and applying this to God, we have somewhat different notions of his goodness abstractly considered, and of the rectitude or holiness of his nature, his justice, and his truth; all which in conjunction with unchangeable goodness make up his true moral character, and are the intire object of our affection.

Now, let any man calmly consider how his mind is affected towards these qualities in a limited degree of perfection. Let him try what a difference his heart naturally makes between the generous patriot,

triot, the faithful friend, the inflexibly righteous judge, the kind benefactor, and the directly opposite characters as they are represented in history. Whether the one does not necessarily attract his veneration and esteem, and the other beget his contempt and aversion, though they are supposed to be at the remotest distance from his personal knowledge, and without a possibility of having any effect on his own interest. Let him place these contrary objects in a nearer point of view, applying the characters so far as they may be justly applied within his particular acquaintance; (for the condition of the world is not at any time either so good or so bad, but that this distinction is manifest;) still it will evidently appear that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour; and that unblemished integrity, with all the public and private virtues, command a peculiar respect, shining through all the obscurity which superstition and a party-spirit have been able to throw upon them, and still as the moral character rises in perfection, our esteem for it proportionably increaseth.

But let us suppose a being of the most perfect rectitude, goodness, and all other moral excellencies, in the nearest situation, and most intimately related to ourselves;---That there is a constant intercourse between him and us,---We have daily opportunities of observing his conduct, the manifestations of his amiable attributes, and on the other hand, our behaviour is continually in his view.---That we have received innumerable benefits, indeed our all from his bounty, and constantly depend upon him for every thing we need;---That he is our supreme immediate governor, and that our present and future state, with all the changes in them, are absolutely under his disposal; surely we cannot doubt but this Being is the proper object of our highest affection. And if far inferior degrees of moral goodness in our fellow-creatures necessarily attract veneration and esteem,

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esteem, (even though beheld at a distance,) and our interest is not concerned in the effects of it; such absolute perfection placed in the strongest point of light, being exerted upon ourselves, must raise in every attentive mind a superlative reverence and love.

But let us observe the natural workings of the human heart towards such a perfect moral character, so manifested, and falling within our knowledge, whereby we shall understand the genuine operations of the love of God, and be able to discern them in our own minds. First, it is accompanied with a desire of imitation. Since we ourselves are indued with a moral capacity, it seems to be utterly inconsistent, and what human nature is not capable of, that moral excellence should be an object of affectionate esteem, yet without a desire of resembling it. Let any man fix his attention to the amiable ideas of honesty, justice, mercy, and fidelity, as exemplified in a particular moral agent well known to him, and try whether he does not find secret earnest wishes in his own soul, that he were possessed of the same qualities? Indeed this principle seems to have a very great influence on the generality of mankind, whose tempers and behaviour are in a great measure formed by example, never without the appearance of some moral species to recommend it; and it is the great practical principle of religion. For, according to men's notions of the Deity, so are their dispositions and their moral conduct; of which the history of all ages, and all religions, afford us very plain instances. Just sentiments concerning the supreme Being, as perfectly holy, righteous, and good, naturally tend to produce, and when seriously considered with hearty and pure affection, actually have produced the like tempers and manners in men, carrying human virtue to its greatest height of perfection; whereas the erroneous opinions of many concerning the dispositions of their Gods, (still retaining an idea of their dominion,)

dominion,) have, above all things, corrupted their morals by the desire of imitation, and added the strongest sanction to their vices. Such is the force and the natural operation of love to moral agents, those especially who are supposed to be in a superior condition, and above all, the acknowledged object of religious respect. And by this clear evidence we may try the sincerity of our professed love to the true God; nor can any attentive mind that would not wilfully deceive itself, be at a loss in judging by these plain scripture rules, * *Be ye followers of God as dear children.* † *And if ye call on the father, who without respect of persons judgeth all men, be ye holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called you is holy.*

Secondly, sincere love to the Deity, considered as a being of the most perfect moral character, with whom we have to do in such a variety of important relations, and in whose presence we are continually, is always accompanied with an earnest desire of his approbation.

If we look carefully into our own hearts, we shall find that this never is, nor can be separated from an affectionate esteem; and that the love of any person naturally directs us to form our conduct to his liking, and make it our constant study to please him. So it is in inferior instances; children make it their principal endeavour to please their parents, servants their masters, and subjects their sovereigns; not only so, but they who live together upon terms of the most perfect equality, are determined by their social affections, to render themselves agreeable to each other. It is thus that the desire of honour, and the fear of disgrace, (powerful principles of action in the human nature,) are to be accounted for: our mutual affections strongly engage us to seek mutual esteem; and while we love mankind, it is impossible to be wholly indifferent whether we have their approbation or not. But as this principle makes a

* Eph. v. 1.

† Pet. i. 17-15.

distinction among men, (for a well-disposed mind values the approbation of others in proportion to their wisdom and virtue,) so it operates in the same manner towards beings of different orders. Intelligent agents of other species are the objects of our esteem as well as mankind; and if we suppose ourselves under their observation, it will naturally be our desire to approve our conduct to them according to the degree of their apprehended wisdom and superior moral excellence. Especially the sincere love of that being who is so intimately present with us as to know the secrets of our hearts, and who is unparallel'd in all moral perfections, our gracious father, guardian, and governor, will determine us to make it the principal aim of our lives, and of all our deliberate designs and actions, that we may be approved of him. If therefore God has made his will known to us; if he has directed us after what manner we shall act so as to please him, our obedience is the natural expression of our love to him, and in vain shall we pretend to have that affection in our hearts, while we do not keep his commandments. But every man has the work of the divine law written in his heart. By a fair and unprejudiced attention to the first dictates of his own mind upon every question relating to his moral conduct, (without entering into perplexing debates, which generally take their rise from some degree of inward dishonesty, and tend to error rather than the knowledge of the truth,) he knows what will be acceptable to his great ruler and judge, so far as to assure his heart, and have confidence towards him; which by the unalterable appointment of supreme goodness is the genuine result of integrity in all good affections, comprehended in loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.

The same practical principle of love to God, which is manifested by obedience to his precepts as its inseparable effect, will also produce an absolute submis-

sion to the appointments of his providence, with intire confidence in him. For if we have habitually upon our minds an affectionate sense of his supreme dominion, exercised with the most perfect wisdom, and constantly and invariably pursuing, as its chief end, the greatest good, what can follow more naturally than that we should be satisfied in all events, and wholly resigned to his will? These two, a sincere uniform disposition exerted in practice to keep his commandments, and a chearful unrepining submission to his providence, constitute that temper of mind in which true piety consists, and which is the perpetual source of inward serenity and joy. So far as we deviate from them, and are conscious of rebellious inclinations and of unsubmitive discontent, misgiving fears arise in our minds of his disapprobation; because then it appears that we are not made perfect in love, for love made perfect by the fruits of obedience and resignation, only, *casts out fear*.

The supreme Being, whose glorious character justly claims our highest affection and most devout regards, is not indeed intuitively discerned by us; he is not the immediate object either of our external or internal senses. † *Behold (says Job) I go forward but he is not there, (visible) and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* It is by our reason we are convinced of his existence and his perfections. But if we are thoroughly convinced; and if his being, as he is in himself absolutely perfect, righteous, and good, be the real object of our understandings, nature directs the exercise of our affections to him; which do not wholly depend on our manner of apprehending their objects, but our persuasion concerning the reality of them. Suppose a person of eminent worth in a situation remote from our acquaintance, and we have no other knowledge of his being and virtues than we

† Job xxiii. 8, 9.

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have of other distant facts ;-- This character will attract our veneration, tho' it may not affect our minds so sensibly as immediate conversation would do. And suppose us to have only rational, not sensible evidence, that a friend is so near as to remark our words and actions, we should surely have a regard to his presence suitable to our esteem of his character. In like manner, if we believe that the invisible God is intimately present with us, that in him we live and move and have our being, and that he is acquainted, not only with our outward actions, but our most secret thoughts,---What can be more rational than that we should form our conduct with an eye to his approbation? That we should *walk before him*, (as the scripture expresses a religious course of life) and be *perfect*, that is, sincerely righteous and good as *he is*; this, one would think, must be inseparable from a firm persuasion, and a high esteem of his absolutely perfect moral character.

There may be, and very probably will be an entirely different manner of apprehending the divine Being and perfections in the future state. There is no difficulty in conceiving that the human mind may have faculties and ways of perceiving objects wholly new, and of which we can now form no idea, as we know that various intelligent creatures are endued with various capacities, whereby are conveyed to them ideas peculiar to themselves. Why may we not suppose that the supreme Being himself, and his glorious attributes, shall be the immediate object of the mind's intuition, discerned not by the distant and unaffected way of reasoning from effects to their causes, but as clearly and directly as we now perceive the objects of sense, or even our own powers and operations ; which the sacred writers describe by *seeing him face to face*, and *knowing as we are known*, and illustrate the superior excellence of it above our present manner of conceiving the sublime subject, by an allusion to the difference between the knowledge of children and of

grown men. The affections then will operate according to the clearer views of the understanding, in a manner of which we have not now a distinct notion. But since we find by experience that sensible things, (low as they are in their nature, and of little importance to the main ends of our being, yet) do by their immediate presence, and the strong impression they make upon our minds, excite vehement desires, and raise sensations of pleasure, which the cool and rational consideration of the same objects could never produce; and moral qualities, even imperfect in their kind, and but imperfectly understood, yet attract very intense affection, and are contemplated with great delight;---we must conclude that infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, in conjunction, (which gave birth to the universe, and is the sole cause of all created being, and all felicity, seen not darkly and through a glass, but shining upon the soul in its full unclouded splendor,) will fill it with joy unspeakable and full of glory, be the adequate object of its highest affections, the center of rest, its last end, and most complete happiness.

In the mean time, obscure knowledge, cold and languid affections, and imperfect enjoyment, belong to our present state of probation and discipline, through which we are passing to a more exalted condition of existence. Our business therefore is, without repining at the appointments of providence, to improve the capacities and advantages we now enjoy, so as the proper end of them may be attained. Particularly, since our knowledge of God is not by intuition, but by reflection and reasoning, which are the proper exercises of our own powers, we ought to employ our selves actively in them. We know that the mind can turn its thoughts and attention to particular objects, and use other means which by observation and experience appear conducive to its improvement in the knowledge of them. In the present case, this seems to be the principal duty which

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the supreme Being requires of us. For since by the constitution of our nature, we have affections which will of themselves arise towards him when known; and since we are endued with a capacity, and furnished with the means of knowing, rather than with the actual knowledge of him; the most obvious obligation on creatures in such a state, and the most important part of their trial is, to improve that capacity by deliberate attention and reasoning, and to apply themselves diligently to the use of those means.

It follows, that the exercise of sincere piety, all summ'd up in the love of God, is always proportionable to our clear and distinct perception of his nature and attributes, in a rational way; and therefore it is necessary to religion that we preserve the free and undisturbed use of our intellectual powers. Our affections to other objects are excited by sense without consideration. The imagination, which often misleads the judgment, heightens their fervour; and the passions which violently agitate the soul, (and always need to be restrained rather than inflamed,) seem, in their original intention and within their proper bounds, rather designed to serve the purposes of the animal life and our condition in this world, than the sublime exercises of the mind, and the highest ends of our being: but true devotion, which is wholly founded in the understanding, always keeps pace with its calm and deliberate exercise; and the rule by which we ought to judge of its sincerity, is not extatic rapture and vehement emotion of mind, but a constant resignation to the will of God, and a steady purpose of approving ourselves to him in the whole course of our actions; *for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*

DISCOURSE XII.

The necessary and immutable Difference
between Moral Good and Evil.

[CHANDLER.]

ISAIAH V. 20.

*Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil;
that put darkness for light, and light for dark-
ness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for
bitter.*

THERE can be no stronger argument, or surer evidence of an universal and intire corruption of mankind, than their confounding the natures of moral good and evil, and paying no regard to the eternal and immutable distinction between virtue and vice. This must proceed not from any *natural incapacity* to discern the essential difference between these things, but either from a shameless obstinacy and impudence in vice, or else from a mind and conscience absolutely perverted and blinded by criminal indulgences and sinful passions.

God's ancient people, the *Jews*, had the same common light of nature and reason to guide them, which all other nations had; and besides this, were favoured with a system of excellent laws given them by *Moses* their lawgiver, under the direction of *Jehovah* himself, who formed them into a republick: laws which sup-
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posed, and were generally founded upon this eternal and immutable difference. Under such advantages, one would not easily imagine, that they should degenerate into such stupidity and wickedness, as to lose all sense of what their own reason, and the law of God so plainly and strongly dictated to them. But it is the too common and fatal effect of obstinacy in vice, that it not only captivates and enslaves men, but darkens their understandings, hardens their consciences, and corrupts their judgments; even so far, as that it oftentimes almost extinguishes their natural sense of things, and renders them incapable of clearly discerning the evidence and certainty of the most obvious and important truths.

This was the case of many amongst the *Jews*. They had fallen into the most criminal excesses, and abandoned themselves to the worst of sins, till by degrees they grew so intirely corrupted, as either to lose all manner of apprehension of the difference between moral good and evil, or at least to endeavour to defend themselves and others in their impieties and vices, by pretending to reason and argue that there was none. This is what God threatens them for with the severest punishment, in the words of my text : *Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.* These things, though of different natures, are here joined together, to denote, that the difference of nature and consequences between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, is as certain and real, as that between any natural and sensible objects whatsoever; and that it may be as easily discerned by the minds of men as the distinction between *light and darkness* is by the bodily eye; and that it argues as great perverseness to dispute or deny it, as it would be to dispute or deny the difference between *bitter and sweet*, or between the most contrary and opposite relishes of the palate whatsoever : so that these words inform us,

- I. That the difference between moral good and evil, is certain, necessary, and immutable.
- II. That this difference is as easily and clearly to be discerned, as the difference between any natural and sensible objects whatsoever.
- III. That the confounding, or habitually disregarding this essential and immutable difference, will be attended with the most pernicious and destructive consequences.

I. These words inform us, that there is *as certain* and immutable a difference between *moral good and evil*, virtue and vice, as there is between *darkness and light*, and *bitter and sweet*; a difference *not accidental* to, but founded in the nature of the things themselves; not merely the result of the determination and arbitrary will of another, but which the very ideas of the things themselves do really and necessarily include. That a circle is not a square, nor a square a triangle; but that they are essentially different figures, and have distinct affections and properties, and that they do not convey the same or similar ideas, is obvious to every man who hath eyes to behold them, and an understanding to discern the attributes that are peculiar to them. In like manner, piety to God, gratitude for benefits received, justice and charity, temperance and chastity, and the like virtues, are as essentially distinct from, and do convey as opposite and different ideas to impiety, ingratitude, injustice, uncharitableness, intemperance, lust, and the like vices; so that it is absolutely impossible they can form the same ideas, or raise the same sentiments or apprehensions in our breasts: and though men may disregard these intrinsic and necessary differences in their practices, through the warmth of passion, or the powerful influence of corrupt habits; yet they can no more

more destroy them, nor actually reconcile, and make the ideas of them to *coincide*, and become indivisibly the same, than they can unite the two extremes of heaven, or make the two opposite sensations of *light and darkness, sweet and bitter, cold and heat*, to become absolutely the same.

Hence it follows, That if moral good and evil, virtue and vice, are naturally and *essentially different*, and do convey absolutely distinct and even opposite ideas; this difference is strictly and *properly eternal*, i. e. It was as true, from all eternity, that light could not be the same thing as darkness, nor darkness as light; that virtue could not be the same thing as vice, nor vice as virtue; or that these things could not convey one and the same idea, as it can be true that they do not now. And supposing the eternal and immutable existence of God, the ideas of these things, must have been the same in his all-perfect mind from eternity, as they now are, and have appeared to his understanding with the same opposition and contrariety of nature to each other as they do now. This is evident from the very notion of the divine knowledge; which consists, not in having an infinite number of confused, disordered, and unconnected ideas, but in discerning the *very nature* of things, seeing them *as they really and truly are*, and in perceiving their respective relations and connections, their necessary and unalterable oppositions and repugnancies, together with all the consequences that may possibly or certainly flow from these their *habitudes* to each other. To conceive things otherwise than they really are, is not knowledge, but the want of it. 'Tis ignorance and error; and therefore God cannot conceive moral or natural good to be moral or natural evil; because this would be to conceive things otherwise than they really are; and of consequence the distinction between moral good and evil is as eternal as the knowledge of God himself, i. e. strictly and absolutely eternal.

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Hence it farther follows, that this difference between moral good and evil, is *absolutely immutable*, and incapable of any possible alteration. Whilst the nature of these things remains what it is, they must ever be the same in the perceptions of the divine mind; and as the difference between them is essential, necessary, and strictly eternal, that difference must remain necessarily and eternally, *i. e.* immutably the same; and therefore the mind or will of God cannot be supposed capable of altering their natures; because it implies an absolute impossibility, and because impossibilities are *no objects* of power: and therefore if God could be supposed capable of *willing* such an alteration, it must be a will *without influence* or efficacy.

God may indeed bring into *actual existence* a great variety of creatures, with very *different powers*, faculties, and relations to each others; and who, in consequence hereof, may be under obligations to discharge duties of very *different kinds* and natures: or God may *alter* the nature of the very beings themselves, which now exist. He may *lower* angels to the state of man; he may *exalt* men into the condition of angels, or *degrade* them into brutes or stones; or *raise up out of stones children for himself*. In all these cases, as the nature and circumstances of external beings, *actually existing*, may vary, so must their relations too; and of consequence the *duties* resulting from these different states, characters, and relations, *will vary* as the nature and relations of the beings themselves do. But *the nature* of moral good and evil, in their whole extent, and in their relation to every class of reasonable beings, doth not in the least depend upon their actual existence.

Before ever any created being received its existence, God had, within himself, the ideas of all possible futurities, of the nature of all beings that should afterwards have life, of their several relations to himself, and one another; and saw what fitnesses, obligations, and duties would and must result from, and belong to

creatures thus formed and constituted. Without this he could never have created them at all. He saw it absolutely and essentially fit, that all beings, created with reasonable powers, should own and acknowledge their dependance on, and obligations to himself, their great former and father; consult the preservation and welfare of their own natures, and according to their respective abilities and opportunities, promote each others happiness, and govern all their actions so as should most effectually conduce to these excellent purposes. God saw these fitnesses as certainly and as clearly, when as yet his creatures had no being, as he could do after their actual existence: and therefore, as the ideas of such beings and such relations do necessarily infer these consequent fitnesses arising out of, and not any ways accidental to the things themselves, even antecedent to the actual existence of such beings, the fitnesses resulting from such relations, when actually taking place, must be absolutely unalterable.

Nor is it in any manner derogating from the power of God to affirm, That he himself is not capable of altering or confounding the nature of these things. No person of reflection and candor would scruple to affirm, That God cannot make the doctrine of *transubstantiation* to be true, *i. e.* that God cannot make a *wafer* of bread, to be *God himself*, whilst it retains the accidents and properties of a wafer; nor the one single *individual body* of Christ, to be really and actually present in *ten thousand* places at once; nor his body to be whole, unbroken, and uneaten at the same time that it is eaten, chewed, broken, and devoured. Every one that can see at all, may see the infinite absurdity, and the absolute impossibility of such assertions, and immediately discern the most palpable and irreconcilable contradictions. If therefore God cannot make these things to be true, because they imply a necessary contradiction to all truth, by a parity of reason, he cannot do any other thing which implies as certain and irreconcilable a contradiction to truth; consequently he cannot alter the nature of moral good and

and evil; his will can never make the one to be the other, because the very ideas of them imply an essential opposition to each other, or the negation or absence of each other; and therefore, the uniting, reconciling, and making them to be one and the same thing, involves in it an impossibility and absurdity.

Hence we may see the *true sense* and meaning of the expression, which hath been often made use of on this subject, *viz.* That the difference between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, is so essential and necessary, as to be *intirely independent on the will of God*. Possibly the phrase may seem a *little harsh*, at first view, to persons not accustomed to reason on this subject. But, as I apprehend it just, so I hope you will be fully reconciled to it, when explained with proper care and caution. When therefore 'tis asserted, That the difference between moral good and evil, *is independent on the will of God*; the meaning is not, that the mind of God had not, from all eternity, a full discernment of this distinction, or that there ever was any period of duration, when the idea of this difference was not present to his all-perfect mind; or that God ever did not, or could not, will that his reasonable creatures, when existing, should guide their actions according to it; or that the will of God, injoining moral virtue, and forbidding moral evil, doth not carry in it a very strong and powerful obligation upon them to practise the one, or forbear the other; or, that God could not have formed beings with different powers and relations, if he had so willed, and by consequence under very different obligations from what they now are; or, that the existence of the creatures that now are, and their respective obligations actually taking place, is not to be resolved into the will and pleasure of God. No; none of these things are implied in this assertion. The true and only meaning of it is, That the distinction between moral good and evil doth so arise out of the nature of the things themselves, as not to be originally and properly the mere effect of the divine order and will, so as that it never

would

would have been, had not God willed and commanded it to be; but that this difference did originally and eternally subsist in the mind of God, as certainly as the difference between light and darkness, and was, in idea, ever present with him, before ever it became the law of his creatures, and appeared to them as the matter of his command and will; and is itself that necessary, invariable, and eternal rule by which God himself regulates and determines his own will and conduct to his creatures; and which therefore, as a rule of action to himself, must be supposed to be independent of, and prior to, not the existence of God, which is absolutely eternal, but to the will of the eternal God, and to be indeed the great reason and measure of all his actions towards his creatures. And indeed, nothing appears to me with greater evidence, certainty, and clearness, than that, if the ideas of all truth subsisted eternally in the mind of God, truth in its original and nature, can, in no sense, be the creature of power, or the mere effect of arbitrary pleasure; but strictly coeternal with God himself: and thus far, as intirely independent of his order and will, as his own being, perfection, and happiness.

And, I apprehend, that this difference of things, arising out of their very natures, is not only true, but a truth of the utmost importance, for settling and ascertaining the proper foundation of moral good and evil; yea, of such importance, that we cannot even form any true conceptions of the perfections and attributes of God without it. For instance; when we say that God doth *necessarily exist*; doth not this suppose a natural and fixed difference between *necessary* and *precarious existence*, eternal as the being of God, and absolutely independent on his will; because, was the existence of God dependent on his will, it would directly destroy the notion of its being necessary? In like manner, when we say, that God is *eternal, immense, intelligent, all-powerful*, and the like, we mean, that God is not a *temporary, limited, unconscious, impotent*

tent being; and by consequence do suppose, that the distinctions between eternity and time, immensity and limitedness, intelligence and unconscioufness, power and weakness, are not arbitrary, and owing merely to the will of God, but as necessary and eternal as the being of God himself; because without the perfections I have mentioned, we can have no possible conceptions of God, nor any possible conception of these perfections, without including in it an absolute negation of their contraries and opposites.

In like manner, with respect to God's moral perfections, when we say, That God is *wise, and just, and good*, and eternally and unalterably so, we mean, at least, that God is not a *foolish, unrighteous, evil, and cruel* being; and therefore must suppose, that the difference between wisdom and folly, justice and injustice, evil and good, cruelty and mercy, is absolutely eternal and unalterable as God himself, of whom we affirm the one, and deny the other, and therefore is not owing to his willing that it should be so, nor alterable at his pleasure, nor dependent on him for its continuance. For if the distinction between these *moral entities*, or objects, was merely arbitrary, and originally the result *only* of the will of God, it can never be affirmed of him, that he is eternally and immutably the one, and not the other: for upon this supposition he *was not wise*, or just, or good, till he *willed* to be so; and might have been foolish, unjust, and evil, by a like determination of his will, if there be no essential, immutable difference in the things themselves: nor can there be any possible certainty of God's continuing, for the future, to be wise, and just, and good, and not the contrary. For if there be no other difference between the one and the other, but what the will of God hath constituted, that will ceasing, or altering, these distinctions, in consequence, must cease or alter, and God may be evil instead of good, or rather good and evil at the same time, which is an evident absurdity and contradiction.

So

So that I apprehend it plainly appears, that the very notion of God implies the necessary, essential, eternal, immutable, and independent difference between moral good and evil: and indeed without this supposition we could have no sure and fixed rule of action ourselves as reasonable creatures. For if piety, justice, charity, and the like virtues, are the creatures of mere power, and the precarious effects of absolute will and pleasure; * power and will may immediately alter them, cancel men's obligations to regard them, and substitute in the room of them impiety, injustice, and cruelty, as the great obligations and duties of human nature. Nor can there be, upon this supposition, any one substantial reason alledged, why such a change should not take place. For if there be no essential and immutable distinction between these things, arising out of their very natures; if some of them are not originally and unalterably good, and others not originally and unalterably evil; absolute power and will can have no certain and fixed rule and reason to pass any determination concerning them, but must act upon the most lawless, unstable, and capricious foundation possible.

To urge here that the will of God *will be certainly* and immutably *rightly determined*, and that therefore we may be sure he will *always will* that which is fit and good, is to say; either that God makes the intrinsic difference of things the rule of his determinations, and the measure of his will; which is to affirm, that this difference is in the things themselves, and therefore antecedent to, and independent of his will, which is what I am arguing for: or else, that God will immutably determine that which is just and good, though justice and goodness have no certain and necessary foundation in nature, and therefore have no necessary excellency and perfection in them; but are mere indifferent, arbitrary things, set up by power, and to be destroyed by power at pleasure; reasonable and fit only during the pleasure of him that constitutes

* *Vid.* Cicer. de Legibus, l. i. c. 16.

them so, and unreasonable and unfit upon the change of his will, and the contrary determination of it. The consequence of which is, that there can be no possible certainty that God shall always will that which is now good, in opposition to what is now called evil, but the one or the other, as caprice or humour shall direct him; which immediately becomes either good or evil, and on the contrary evil or good, for no other reason, but because he *without reason* wills them to be so. According to which scheme the foundations of religion and moral virtue must be as precarious as that will, which hath no essential difference of things, nor any fixed rule of truth and reason to influence and determine it.

Having thus established, and I think demonstrated the necessary and unalterable difference between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, I proceed farther to observe: That there are certain *original and unalterable fitnesses and unfitnesses* which do arise from these eternal and immutable distinctions, as necessary and unchangeable as the distinctions themselves; which fitnesses or unfitnesses were eternally present to the all-comprehensive mind of God, and as clearly discerned by him as the natural differences of the things themselves from whence they flow, *i. e.* in other words: supposing the existence of reasonable beings, it is immutably reasonable and fit that they should regard and practise that system of moral virtue, which belongs to their natures and respective characters, and abstain from the contrary moral evil.

Moral good and evil are, I think, a kind of *relative terms*, *i. e.* they do suppose either *in idea* or *actual existence* certain reasonable beings, and certain relations in which they stand to each other. Before ever the creation was formed, God was *in* and from himself possessed of infinite perfection, of all that power and wisdom, which could not but exert themselves in all acts of justice and goodness to his creatures, after their being brought into actual existence; the original fitness

ness of which conduct towards them was clearly discerned by God, whilst they were yet only present in idea to his mind, and arose from those apprehended relations which were actually in time to subsist between God and them. And as God had nothing to determine him in the formation of the world, but the direction of his own infinite understanding and wisdom, he was undoubtedly at liberty to form what systems of beings he thought proper. He might have formed other creatures than what he hath, or produced some or all of those which now exist, in a different manner from what he actually hath done. He might, for instance, have stocked our earth with inhabitants at once, and formed them in the same manner as he did our first parents. And of consequence, as the present frame of things is owing to the wisdom, the good pleasure and will of God, so the fitnesses of things which now actually take place, and that particular system of moral virtue which mankind are obliged to regard and conform themselves to, must, as far as it is a constitution of things *actually existing*, be resolved into the same good pleasure and will of God; because those relations of mankind to each other, from whence their peculiar moral obligations flow, are solely of his appointment and forming.

When indeed God had actually given being to reasonable creatures, of such particular capacities and circumstances, their relations to each other, and the fitnesses and obligations resulting from them became certain and necessary. When he determined that the race of mankind should be propagated in the manner it now is, he determined that the relations of parents and children should actually take place, and that therefore those particular fitnesses and obligations, that parents should take care of their children, and that children should be dutiful and grateful to their parents, should be the certain and immutable law of their nature and condition; and when these relations once actually subsisted, the fitnesses of those duties

necessarily resulted from them, and were no longer dependent on the will of God, whether they should carry in them any reasonable obligation or not; and when they become the matter of an immediate divine command, they were not therefore reasonable *only because* commanded, but commanded because naturally, and antecedently reasonable. But if God had pleased to form the whole race of mankind at once, as there would not then have actually existed amongst them the relations of parents and children, parental tenderness and filial gratitude would not have been things fitting in such a state, could not have been the matter of a divine command to them, and therefore could have laid them under no obligation, either in reason or from authority. So that as the present frame of the world, and the relations that actually subsist amongst mankind, are owing to the sovereign wisdom and pleasure of the great creator, though it was eternally and immutably true, that such relations whenever existing, would certainly infer such fitnesses and obligations in reason, yet that the present system of morality doth now actually take place amongst us, is intirely owing to the same wisdom and pleasure of God; but is not alterable by the will of God, whilst the present frame of things, and the relations that now subsist amongst mankind, continue to remain what they now are.

And the reason of this is evident, because the fitness and unfitness of moral good and evil are as necessary and certain, as the natural and original difference between them. For instance, moral virtue consists, either in *the right disposition* of a reasonable being's *mind*, or in *his right behaviour* towards other beings, to whom he bears such peculiar relations. The fitness therefore of moral virtue arises from the certain connexion there is between a being *so circumstanced*, and *such a particular disposition* as is correspondent to his nature and circumstances; and between *the distinguishing relations* he sustains to other beings, and *such*

a behaviour as is answerable to those relations. If I have powers and faculties which render me capable of consideration and reflection, it is an instance or duty of moral virtue, that I should employ my powers and faculties for this end and purpose; and the fitness of this instance of moral virtue consists in this, *viz.* in the certain and evident relation that the having reasonable powers bears to the regular and proper use of them. If I am a creature derived and dependent, gratitude and love, and praise to the great author of my being, are also instances of like moral virtue; and the fitness and reasonableness of these moral duties arise from the necessary relations of creator and creature, the connection between benefits conferred, and benefits received, the reception of benefits, and the proper acknowledgment of them by those who have them. If there be any person whom God hath appointed as the saviour of mankind from ignorance, vice, and misery; to instruct, reform, and govern them, and bring them to a state of perfection and happiness; and if this person hath by his example, doctrines, sufferings, death, and resurrection, done every thing that is necessary and fit to answer these purposes of the wisdom and mercy of God; the necessary consequence is, that submission to him in all his characters, and a thankful acknowledgment of his benefits, are also things essentially fit in themselves, and necessary instances of moral virtue; things as eternally and immutably fit, as any other branches of moral virtue that can be named, because there is an original, necessary, unalterable, relation between such characters and benefits conferred, and such a submission to an acknowledgment of him. And as there is no one duty relating to our blessed Saviour, which the gospel revelation injoin us, but what necessarily results from some character or relation, that he bears to us; those duties will appear to be, in the strictest sense, of moral obligation, and amongst the eternal and unalterable fitnesses of things. The same might be de-

monstrated of all other instances of virtue that are properly moral, that there is a real proportion and immutable fitness and correspondence between them and the relations and characters to which they belong; the unavoidable consequence of which is, that moral evil or vice must be naturally, absolutely, in itself, and therefore always unreasonable and unfit; because there is no relation and natural connexion, but an original and immutable disproportion, opposition, and contradiction between the disposition and behaviour that vice implies, and the acknowledged relations and characters of mankind. The having reasonable powers can have no possible relation to, or natural connexion with the neglect or the abuse of them; nor an opposition to the government of God and proving ungrateful to him, ever be shewn to be the proper result or reasonable consequence of having received being, and the supports of it from his goodness; but on the contrary appear at first view to imply an absurdity and contradiction.

As therefore the difference between moral good and evil, and the fitnesses and unfitnesses which result from them, is certain in itself, and immutable in its nature, I would farther observe, that this is *the supremam*, and original, and *universal rule of action* to all reasonable beings whatsoever. It is the one certain and *unerring rule of God* himself, who as he hath no superior, can receive laws from none, nor have any external power to oblige and constrain him. But that he hath a reason and rule of action within himself, is *as evident* as that he ever acts at all, and *as certain*, as that he will always act wisely and well. Now this rule of action to the divine being, I think we can conceive to be nothing else but his all-comprehensive knowledge, or his perfect conception of the natures of all things, the relations which the several beings he hath formed stand in to himself, and to one another, the fitnesses and unfitnesses which belong to them, the measure and degree of their powers and faculties, and all the
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several circumstances of their beings. Having this full perception of all things he can never be at a loss how to act, nor possibly do amiss *through error* and mistake; being possessed of infinite power he can never act wrong, *through impotence* and weakness; having no being superior to himself, he can never receive law from another, nor act contrary to the moral fitness of things *through force* and constraint; having no irregular passions, affections, and inclinations, he can never be perverted, and *biased from within himself*, to an unreasonable and unbecoming conduct. In a word, being absolutely free from every external constraint, and internal defect, his power can have no other guide, nor his will have any thing else to determine it, but his own infinite understanding and wisdom. And as he discerns all things as they really are, his will must ever be determined rightly, according to the immutable natures and eternal differences of things themselves, and the respective natures, conditions, and circumstances of the several creatures which he hath formed.

The consequence of which is, that what is the invariable and *eternal rule* of the divine conduct, must be *the supremam*, and most perfect *rule* of action to all reasonable beings whatsoever; because it is impossible that there can be any rule of action *more excellent* in itself, or more worthy the regard of reasonable beings, than that which the uncreated and all-perfect God makes the measure and standard of his own conduct; I mean the immutable differences of things, and the fitnesses and unfitnesses which necessarily result from them. Such is the perfection of the divine nature, that as God can have no other rule of action but this, so he needs none; and as to all created beings, the more invariably they act by it, so much the more perfect and compleat is their virtue and goodness. As they are indeed the workmanship of the first cause, as their particular powers, perfections, and relations, are the effects of his power and constitution, all those fit-

nesses and duties which flow from them are to be looked on and regarded as enforced and enjoined by his authority and will; it being as evidently the will of the great Creator that we should perform all those duties of moral virtue which are the result of, and necessarily connected with our nature and relations, as it was that we should be the particular kind of creatures that we are. And therefore *the will* of God is a real and *immutable obligation* upon us, to which we should always pay the highest deference and submission. But even this comes under the general notion of the original fitnesses of things, and is not an obligation of a distinct nature and kind from them; because, if any one was to be asked, Why the will of God should be obeyed? he could give, I apprehend, no other rational answer, but that it is eternally and immutably fit, that all creatures should obey the will of their creator and God. Not that *mere power* carries in it, *of itself*, any proper, reasonable obligation; or, that *the arbitrary will* of another is, *without other considerations*, a reason for submitting to it. No; 'tis absolutely fit that God's will should be obeyed; because he hath a sovereign and unalienable right in his creatures, and will not command any thing that is unreasonable and unfit for them to do. And therefore, though the will of God be a reason and certain rule of action to all his creatures, yet is it not any thing distinct from the everlasting fitnesses of things, but included in them, and indeed a necessary and essential branch of them.

I would only farther add on this head, That this notion of the immutable and eternal obligation of moral virtue, is not one of *the peculiar discoveries* of the reason and good sense of the present age, but is plainly taught both in the records of the *Old and New Testament*. On this account the Psalmist speaking of the moral part of the *Jewish law*, says; *† Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is truth: § The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.*

† Psal. cxix. 142. § Ver. 144.

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* *Concerning thy testimonies I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.* Or, as the words should be rendered: *I have known of old, מִצֶּדֶתְךָ from thy testimonies, that thou hast founded them for ever.* I have long since been convinced, from the nature and intrinsic goodness of them, that they are of eternal and immutable obligation. And again; † *Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments is for ever.* These are expressions evidently relating to the eternal and immutable nature of the moral law of God. Upon the same foundation is St. Paul's advice to the *Philippians* §; *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things:* expressions, that necessarily suppose, and infer, that truth, honesty, justice, purity, and, in a word, all the real virtues of human life ||, are essentially different from their contrary vices; are lovely and amiable in their nature, reputable and praise-worthy in their practice; and which both God and man will not fail to approve and commend. And this leads me,

II. To the second general head; which is to shew you, that this difference between moral good and evil, and the fitnesses and unfitnesses which they necessarily infer, is as easily and certainly to be discerned by mankind, as the differences between any natural or sensible objects whatsoever. This, I think, is evidently supposed in the words of my text: *Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.* These two latter natural contraries are added by way of illustration of the former; the prophet not really blaming the *Jews* for putting darkness for light, or bitter for sweet, which no persons who

* Psal. cxix. 152.

† Ver. 160.

§ Chap iv. 8.

|| Vid. Cicer. de Legibus, l. i. c. 16, 17.

had the use of their senses could do ; but for calling *evil good, and good evil*, endeavouring to confound and alter the nature of virtue and vice ; which argued as great stupidity, or wilful obstinacy, as if men should pretend, and affirm, that light was darkness, and sweet bitter, and the contrary. The senses of men teach them to distinguish between these and the like natural objects, and necessarily prevent them from confounding them. And it is as obvious to the understanding of all men, which is to the mind what the eye is to the body, that evil cannot be good, nor virtue vice, whatsoever false methods vicious men may take to blend them, or how unwilling soever they may be to attend to these certain unchangeable distinctions in their practice.

There are some things so perfectly plain and *self-evident*, as that they neither need, nor are capable of demonstration. They are so obvious to the mind, as soon as proposed, as not to admit of any medium, either to explain or prove them. That truth is not falsehood, that light is not darkness, that ease is not pain, are propositions of this kind. And is it not as self-evident and certain, that gratitude is not ingratitude, that kindness is not cruelty, that baseness is not honour, nor falsehood fidelity ? Do not these things convey absolutely, and necessarily, distinct ideas ? The moment they are understood, do they not appear eternal and irreconcilable contraries ? There may indeed be some cases and actions, concerning the nature of which, how far they are right, and how far wrong, it may not be easy to determine. But the reason of this is, not because men are ever at a loss to distinguish between these opposite characters and qualities of right and wrong, good and evil ; but because they sometimes know not how properly to apply them ; they do not understand some principal circumstances of the actions themselves, or the true reasons and motives from whence they proceeded. Had they a perfect view of all these things, they would as easily and certainly know

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know whether to pronounce them good or bad, virtuous or vicious, as they would, whether to pronounce the place where they themselves were present, small or great, lightsome or dark.

Was one to ask the very plainest man that ever lived, who had but common understanding and sense, whether or no light could ever be made darkness, or pleasure made by any being to become the same thing as pain; though he had never been conversant in the schools of philosophy, yet he would not be at a loss to make the true determination: he would immediately see, that as these things are absolutely contrary to one another in their very natures, they could not be made so by, nor depend for their continuing what they are, on the will and pleasure of any being whatsoever; because, as darkness is the negation, or want of light, it is as impossible for any being to make darkness light, as it is for him to make the same things to be and not to be at the same time. And would he not see it to be an equal absurdity to affirm, That the difference between virtue and vice is merely accidental and arbitrary, and depends for its being, or continuing so, upon the will and pleasure of another? Would he want rules of philosophy and any long train of reasoning to convince him, that no being can make impiety, injustice, intemperance, uncharitableness, lewdness, and cruelty, which necessarily, and, in their very nature, imply the negation and want of piety, justice, temperance, charity, chastity, and compassion, to become the self-same things as these very virtues, which they imply the utter want of?

And as this essential difference between good and evil is as obvious and plain to the minds of men, as any first principles possibly can be, so, I apprehend also, is the reasonableness and fitness of practising virtue in opposition to vice. No man needs any arguments to convince him, that pleasure is better than pain, sweet preferable to bitter, and light more comfortable than darkness. Nature and experience are infal-

infallible rules of judgment in these things, and men do almost instinctively choose the former as better than the latter, without any long train of reasoning to persuade and determine them, and without any regard to the command of a superior, obliging them to such a choice. And I imagine, that nature and experience are equally sure guides in things of a moral nature; and that it is as evident to all men, who have not corrupted their minds by bad principles, evil passions, and vicious habits, that moral good is better in itself, more amiable in its nature, and more beneficial in all its consequences, than moral evil; and that when they judge impartially, they can no more help approving virtue, in opposition to vice, than they can help approving harmony in opposition to discord, or those things that give them pleasure preferably to those that occasion them pain. As they need no command or law to enable them to discern the natural difference in these things, they as little need them to help them to pass the true judgment concerning them, or to teach them which, upon the whole, is fittest for them to choose and refuse.

Nature itself seems to have been friendly to mankind in this respect, which hath implanted a kind of *constitutional abhorrence* of vice in their minds, an *instinctive prejudice* against it, and fear to commit it. And though they are too often led by the strength of appetite, and warmth of passion to do evil, yet, in the beginning, 'tis generally with great reluctance and opposition of mind. Their better judgments and consciences reclaim against their practices, and reproach them for doing what they know they ought not to do. Vice is really a kind of art that requires some length of time to become dextrous, and grow any considerable proficient in. Men must first struggle with themselves, and use no small pains to stifle and suppress the natural opposition of their minds to it, before they can be tolerably easy in a vicious course, and *commit iniquity with greediness* and pleasure. Frequent custom
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will undoubtedly gradually wear off that *natural tenderness*, reluctance, modesty, and sense of honour, which the God of nature hath implanted in mens minds, as a guide to, and a check upon their actions, as restraints from vice, and motives to virtue; and, by degrees, so harden them in sin, as that they may, at length, find little uneasiness within themselves upon account of it, and become insensible to all the motives to religion and virtue. The same may also happen in natural things. Men may so accustom themselves to *bitter*, as gradually to reconcile themselves to it, and lose the disagreeable and unpleasing sensation of it. And though poison be abhorrent to the constitution and frame, and men naturally dread it as fatal and destructive; yet they may so habituate themselves to it by frequent and long practice, as to be able to take very considerable quantities of it without fear or harm. But still, as this doth not alter the original natures or qualities of poison or bitter, so neither doth mens habituating themselves to wickedness and vice, till they have lost all dread and terror in the commission of it, in the least change its nature and properties, render it one jot the less evil in itself, or less contrary to the natural uncorrupted dictates of their minds and judgments.

Were we to crowd together into one description all the vices of human nature, and could we point out that single person to whom such a dreadful description would agree; Would not all men conspire to look on him with detestation, and unite in condemning so vile and execrable a character? Would they not fly from him as a monster in his kind, and all of them judge him absolutely unworthy the converse of the whole species? But why, if virtue and vice are mere arbitrary distinctions, or if the knowledge of this difference lay really remote from the meanest understandings, and was not to be discerned without a great deal of previous instruction, difficulty, and labour? Yea, with respect to particular vices, did any one ever coolly

think that the being of a God was to be treated with insolence, contempt, and scorn; that curses and execrations are the proper language of a man, or that perjury was ever meritorious and praise-worthy? Did ingratitude ever appear to any man in his senses, as an amiable and commendable quality in its nature, or as equally lovely and beautiful as a grateful disposition? Was injustice ever thought or described as a real excellency, or treachery esteemed preferable to true honour, falsehood to truth, or cruelty to compassion? Would any man cherish in his bosom, or harbour in his family, an abandoned wretch, whom he knew would attempt the chastity of his dearest relatives, otherwise injure the persons of his family, or rob and plunder him of his substance? Would any one chuse to enter into confidence with a tale-bearer or slanderer; or commit his reputation to one, whom he suspected or knew would betray and ruin it? Did any one ever think, that the dignity of the human form was increased by drunkenness, or that gluttony and excess are real ornaments in themselves, or imply in them any thing fit for, and worthy of imitation? In a word, there are no particular vices that can be named, to which human nature is incident, but those who commit them will find certain occasions and reasons to censure them, and to determine on the side of the contrary virtues. Whence comes it thus, that all sorts of men, of the most different capacities and sentiments as to most other things, yet all concur, without reasoning or delay, to pass the same impartial judgment on these; and chuse to transact the most important affairs of their lives with persons of an established character, for wisdom, piety, honour, and universal virtue, rather than with those of an abandoned and profligate one? Whence comes it but from hence; That they do as certainly see, and can as easily and readily discern the difference between moral good and evil, and the excellency of virtue in preference to vice, as they do the natural difference between light and

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and darkness, and the preferableness of ease and happiness to pain and misery?

Indeed moral and natural good, *i. e.* virtue and happiness, and moral and natural evil, *i. e.* vice and misery, are almost constantly and inseparably connected; and the unavoidable consequences of virtue and vice, of which all men are judges, and which they cannot help discerning, plainly shew which is most reasonable and fit in itself, and best worthy their approbation and choice; consequences that affect particular persons in all the most valuable concerns of their being, and are not less visible in the greater and lesser societies of men themselves. So that as virtue is, in the consideration and idea of it, much more lovely and commendable than vice, so all external appearances are intirely in favour of it, and powerfully lead men to the love and practice of it.

And it would be thus were there no laws at all actually injoining the practice of virtue. Mere authority and command add no intrinsic excellency to the things commanded, make them neither better nor worse than they were before, infer no obligation in reason to obey them, nor carry with them any conviction to any reasonable mind whatsoever. The nature of things is stubborn and obstinate, and will not bend to power and law, nor vary in the least in obedience to the mere motions of will and pleasure. Should all the powers on earth conspire together to enact, That darkness should be light, pain pleasure, sickness health, and life death, the attempt would be as ridiculous as vain. Or should they ordain by law, that wickedness and impiety, intemperance and debauchery, covetousness and rapine, lust and cruelty, malice and envy, should appear amiable and praise-worthy in every man's conscience and judgment, should conduce to the peace and comfort, the preservation, health, usefulness, and happiness of human life, or tend to the good order, strength, honour, and welfare of societies, in opposition to justice and equity, charity and bene-

benevolence, temperance and chastity; every one immediately sees that such a law would be absurd and unnatural, could not accomplish the intended effect, and therefore could not possibly carry in it any manner of reasonable obligation and weight; and that therefore the making use of power and violence to enforce such a law must be tyrannical and wicked. So that 'tis obvious to the common sense of mankind, that all unreasonable laws are in themselves null and void, for this plain reason, because they are unreasonable; and therefore it must be as evident to them, that the reason of things, or the goodness and fitness of what is commanded by law, is the ground and foundation of every law that reason and conscience can oblige us to obey; and of consequence, that there are some things good and fit in themselves, and universally discerned and acknowledged to be such, and therefore proper to be made the subjects of law, and enforced by authority, because reasonable and fit, antecedent to it.

'Tis really thus even with respect to the laws of God himself. That we should love him, and offer our grateful acknowledgments to him, as the author of our beings, the giver of all our mercies, and the only object of our happiness, was evidently reasonable and fit in its own nature, antecedent to any direct law of God injoining it; and is therefore made the matter of a divine law, because it was originally, and in itself proper and fit for God to command. In like manner justice and charity, and all the private and social virtues, have evidently a natural reasonableness in them, and do in their practice necessarily and immutably tend to private and publick happiness; and therefore they are intrinsically and unalterably good, and have in fact been known to be so by the reason and experience of all men in all ages and nations, and are therefore originally fit to be enforced by the authority and law of God. And with respect to all other things whatsoever that have the sanction of a
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divine command, they have some real antecedent fitness either *of means or end*, that is the true reason of their injunction by God. So that the reason of every good and wise law is antecedent to the law itself; and as this reason is only the real and intrinsic excellency, suitableness and fitness of the thing commanded, this excellency and fitness must be generally plain and obvious, to those who are to be governed by law, is antecedent even to the laws of God, independent, in this respect, on his will, and the eternal and invariable rule and measure of all its determinations.

And as this is plain from reason, so it is supposed, and plainly asserted in divine revelation. Indeed unless this were the case, mankind would be no proper judges of the truth and excellency of any real revelation, nor of the falshood and imposture of a pretended and spurious one. Unless the difference between good and evil is real and immutable, and the discernment of it plain and easy, they would have no certain and fixed rule what to receive and what to reject, but might as well submit to and embrace the worst religion in the world, that had but a pretence of revelation, as the best. But as no kind of external evidence, and wonderful appearance of things can prove any religion to be from God, that contains in it either absurdities or falshoods, that gives really dishonourable and unworthy representations of the perfections and ways of God, that prescribes superstitious and impious methods of worshipping him, or that teaches and countenances immorality and vice: it follows from hence, that it is by marks of this kind that men are to judge of every kind of religion that pretends to inspiration and divine authority. But if there be either no difference in the nature of things themselves, or if this difference is so small and uncertain, as that mankind are not capable of discerning and understanding it, then they have no certain rules by which to judge of the nature and design, the truth or falshood of revelation real or pretended, and therefore can be

be under no obligations to give themselves any thought or trouble whatsoever about it. But as this is not true in fact, so all the revelations we have from God do suppose the contrary. Even *Moses* could appeal to the people: *What nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day *?* And *St. Paul* tells us of the *Gentiles* themselves, that *though they had no law*, no law by external revelation from God, yet *they were a law to themselves* †, viz. by the plain dictates of their natural reason and consciences; and that *they shewed that the work of the law was written in their hearts*, as *their consciences bare them witness*, and *their thoughts accused or excused one another*; it being evidently the work and business of a law, to do what the consciences of the *heathens* actually did, viz. to point out the difference between good and evil, and to censure or justify men according as they do either the one or the other. And with respect to christianity, that rule of the apostle holds universally good §: *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*; a precept that can have no other reason and fitness but this; that good and evil are essentially different, and that mankind are abundantly capable of discerning, and making the proper choice between them. And that they should do so will fully appear from,

III. The third and last general, which is to shew you, that the confounding, and habitually disregarding this essential and immutable difference of things will be attended with the most pernicious and destructive consequences. *Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil.* This wo is pronounced upon the corrupt and profligate *Jews* by the prophet in the name of God, and the punishment contained in it is immediately after particularly described: || *As the fire devour-eth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so shall*

* Deut. iv. 8.

† Rom. ii. 14.

§ 1 Thes. v. 21.

|| Ver. 24, 25, 26, 29.

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their root be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust. Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them, and the hills did tremble, and their carcases were tore in the midst of the streets. And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from afar, they shall lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away, and none shall deliver it, i. e. besides all the judgments I have inflicted on them already, I will deliver them over into the hands of their enemies, and they shall carry them away with all their treasures into a long and miserable captivity.

If indeed we consider only the natural consequences that do, more or less, necessarily and inseparably flow from an habitual disregard to, and contempt of the essential differences between moral good and evil, we shall find an immediate punishment connected by the constitution and providence of God, with almost every kind of immorality and vice; and that with respect to particular persons and societies in general. As to individuals, not to mention those † uneasinesses and fears of mind, those inward terrors and reproaches of conscience which are oftentimes the sad effects of sin; there are many other inconveniencies flowing from it, which are evident arguments of the divine disapprobation, and certainly demonstrate the folly and mischief of vice, and that *to depart from evil is the truest understanding*. Every one knows, for there are ten thousand instances in almost every age and nation to prove it, that all indulgences, contrary to the rules and obligations of moral virtue, have a natural and direct tendency to destroy the vigour of men's reasonable powers, to dissipate and waste their worldly substance, and to reduce them to poverty and distress.

† At vero scelerum in homines atque impietatum nulla expiatio est. Itaque poenas luunt, non tam judiciis, quæ quondam nesciamus erant, hodie multifariam nulla sunt, ut sint tamen, persæpe falsa sunt, sed angore conscientiarum, fraudisque cruciatur. Cicer. de Leg. l. i. c. 14.

They lessen men's reputation and good character in the world, and by rendering them contemptible, and often infamous, deprive them of many valuable opportunities of success, and greatly contract their abilities for usefulness. They weaken and disorder their constitutions, prepare their bodies for the most violent distempers, subject them to the most grievous pains, and often end in bitterness and death.

Nor are these bad consequences less visible in Societies themselves, than in private persons. When the distinctions between good and evil are generally disregarded, and the manners of a nation become almost universally profligate; the honour and credit of a people must sink in proportion, their reputation, weight, and influence abroad must lessen, their trade and commerce must decay, the publick strength be enervated, the force and authority of law and government become weak and impotent, disorder and confusion spring up in the room of them, liberty, that greatest of all earthly blessings, grow more and more precarious, persons of all ranks and degrees become venal and servile, and prepare the way for utter ruin and dissolution. To these things have been owing the fall of the greatest empires and kingdoms, that have been the most powerful and famous in the world, as hath been frequently observed with great justice and truth by those who have transmitted the histories of them down to us. Whereas whilst nations have continued virtuous, they have generally continued powerful and strong; whilst they have had no internal symptoms of weakness and dissolution, they have had less to fear from any external violence, and been capable of exerting themselves with that resolution and vigour, which hath been necessary to their security and preservation; so that was nothing else to be regarded but the natural tendencies of things, we might well pronounce a *wo* to that people, who put good for evil, and evil for good.

But besides this, surely there is a God that governs the world, and whose providence is not wholly inattentive to, and regardless of the moral state and character of nations : a God to whom, from the incorruptible rectitude and purity of his nature, a general corruption of manners must be highly displeasing, and who can never be supposed to look with a very favourable regard upon a people who have lost all sense of moral good and evil, and are become universally degenerate from all the original principles and plainest rules of moral virtue. As he hath all the powers of nature absolutely under his controul, and can make the elementary world subservient to the purposes of his providence, I see no absurdity in supposing what revelation seems very plainly to point out, that he may, and will, when the sins of any people make it necessary, *† Curse them in the city and the field, in their basket and in their store ; in the fruit of their body and the fruit of their land, the increase of their kine, and the flocks of their sheep ; make the pestilence cleave to them till it hath consumed them ; § the heavens over them to become as brass, and the earth under them to be as iron ; cause them to be smitten before their enemies, || and strangers to get above them very high, so that they shall not be the head but the tail of the nations ; or send amongst them ¶ a new king who shall not know Joseph, and who shall set over the people cruel task-masters, to afflict them with their burthens.* These and the like calamities have befallen nations as the punishments of an universal degeneracy and corruption of manners, and I think these are the evils they have in such circumstances a great deal of reason always to fear, if there be a providence that really regards the affairs of mankind, and is concerned to maintain the interest of religion and virtue in the world. And thus have I largely spoken to the several things contained in this

† Deut. xxviii. 15, 17, 18, 21.

§ Ibid. 23, 25.

|| Ver. 43, 44.

¶ Exod. i. 8, 11.

passage of the inspired prophet, I shall now conclude all with some suitable inferences.

1. We may see the great wisdom of God, and his goodness to mankind, in making those things, which are of the greatest importance to them, and in which their duty and happiness is most directly and essentially concerned, to be so exceeding evident and plain to them, as that if they will but use their understandings, they may as plainly distinguish and discern them, as they can any sensible objects with their eyes, or such things as are pleasant and wholesome by their taste and palate.

2. We may infer from what hath been said, how strong and unchangeable all men's obligations are to the practice of religion and virtue; as unchangeable as the very nature and reason of things, and as their inclinations are to pursue pleasure before pain, and to embrace happiness in preference to misery.

3. We may infer the great folly and absurdity of men's giving favourable names to vice, and endeavouring to screen the malignity and deformity of it by the honourable appellations of virtue. Vice is so very shameful and odious a thing, as that, one would hope they are but comparatively few arrived to that pitch of insensibility and impudence, as openly to glory in the thing itself, and chuse to be accounted remarkable for impiety and wickedness. And because oftentimes men's natural consciences would censure and render them extremely uneasy, if they allowed themselves in the habitual practice of crimes that would admit of no possible excuse; they endeavour to palliate their faults, and bring them as near as they can to real virtues. Thus some men who are *sordidly penurious* and covetous, would fain have it all pass for *frugality*, and the commendable care of their families and friends. Revelling and *drunkenness* is changed into *good nature and fellowship*. *Lewdness* wears the genteel name of *galantry* and politeness. *Ambition* and envy cover their de-
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deformity, and become reputable and popular, by putting on the garb of merit and *patriotism*. *Censure* and reproach, reviling and scandal, put off their fury-dress, and make their appearance in the sacred habit of *sanctity and zeal*. Thus changed, not in nature, but appearance and name, vice seems to them a less formidable and odious thing, and is sometimes embraced and harboured as an heavenly virtue. But is not such a conduct an argument of the extremest folly? Can any imagine, that this thin and shameless cover can conceal their true character from the all-knowing God? or, that by miscalling vice, they can transform it into a real perfection, and thus confound the unalterable nature and differences of things? Should Satan dress himself like an angel of light, he would be Satan still; his nature would continue the same, though his appearance was altered, and his qualities be truly devilish under the most radiant dress of celestial glory. In like manner vice can never lose its nature and qualities, it will still be vice, a contrariety to God and his laws, to the truth, and reason, and immutable nature of things, and to the true honour and happiness of men, palliate it as much as you please, and call it by whatever favourable names you will. Harbour it in your breasts and it will defile you. Indulge it in your lives and it will sink you under substantial guilt. Compare it with the rule of reason, and the law of God, and it will immediately appear in its true deformity. Think of it in its consequences, and the dreadful scene that will immediately present itself, will be horror and despair. Let us therefore return to the original truth and simplicity of things; nor deceive ourselves by misrepresenting or overlooking our vices and follies. Let covetousness be in every shape, looked on as a sordid meanness unworthy a man. Let revelling and drunkenness no longer appear in the innocent garb of good nature. They are a shame and reproach to human nature, and degrade men sometimes into something meaner than brutes, and

sometimes transform them into furies and devils. Let lewdness and debauchery ever be accounted what they really are in the sight of God, and all reasonable men, as lawless and cruel triumphs over ruined modesty, injured virtue, and prostituted honour and innocence. Let rank ambition no longer conceal its deformity under the sacred cover of patriotism and publick spirit; but ever be detested as an uneasy, restless, treacherous, faithless, impatient, unsatiable, servile, mercenary, fawning, imperious monster. Let scandal, reproach, censoriousness, and rash judgment, ever be abhorred, as certain proofs of a distempered, envious, and bigotted mind, and as sure marks, not of a religious, but of an enthusiastick and superstitious zeal; that hath neither knowledge to enliven it, nor reason, humanity, or conscience to direct it. In a word; let us faithfully and honestly attend to the reason of things, and the representations given of them in divine revelation; and not judge of them by passion, appetite, and prejudice; or by false, selfish, and partial views of them. Thus shall we learn that fear and abhorrence of vice, which is essentially necessary to preserve us uncorrupted amidst the temptations of an ensnaring world, and grow into that fixed and habitual approbation of true piety and virtue, which is necessary to the honour and comfort of the present life, and to secure us the happiness of a better.

DISCOURSE XIII.

God's Moral Government.

[DUCHAL.]

PSAL. xcvi. 9.

With righteousness shall he judge the world.

THAT the works of nature shew contrivance and design; that certain ends are accomplished by certain means, which are fitted and were intended to serve them; that there is a regular order of causes and effects maintained from age to age; and, in a word, that the universe is the work and constantly under the direction of a superintending mind, is a matter so plain, that it is wonderful, that any thinking person could ever bring himself to doubt of it, much more to deny it; and in the room of the original intelligent almighty power to put necessity or chance, (words, which in the present argument really have no meaning) to one or the other of these, as the original cause, ascribing all things in the universe.

But when men have got the idea of an intelligent agent, who made the world and governeth it by his providence, and consider themselves as the creatures of that power, by which all things were created, and in which every individual subsisteth; when they consider the constitution of human nature, with all its

powers, affections, and principles of action, as the work of God; then that sense of *right* and *wrong*, of *moral good* and *evil*, which is the great distinction of mankind from all the inferior orders, appeareth to demand particular notice; as being not only in itself considered the highest and most important faculty of the mind, but as what is given us for directing our conduct, and as what principally pointeth out to man his chief end, and that, which is his supreme good. That the sense of right and wrong must have been intended by the author of our beings, as a law or rule for directing our conduct, is evident; for it is impossible to separate a sense of right and a sense of obligation. *A thing is right, therefore it is to be done; a thing is wrong, therefore it is not to be done;* is the original language of nature, with which every man is acquainted; and while the sense of right and wrong remaineth, the heart instantly and necessarily approveth what appeareth to be right, and condemneth what is judged to be wrong.

But it is an inquiry of the utmost moment to virtue and to human happiness, how the Creator is disposed and affected towards his creatures, whom he hath placed under this law, as they observe it, or deviate from it, in their actions. It may be imagined, and this appeareth plainly to have been the sense of some persons, that, though the universe and all the creatures in it are the work of an original intelligent cause, perfectly wise, powerful, and beneficent, and the whole creation is governed by the sole superintending providence of this being, and particularly, that all the instincts and affections, planted in the heart of man, are his workmanship; yet he doth not at all attend to the temper or behaviour of men, as being, according to the moral quality of them, the objects of his approbation or displeasure: that, tho' he hath given to his creatures the sense of good and evil, of right and wrong, as a means of serving those purposes by them, which *he* had in view, yet he him-
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self hath not that regard to right and wrong, which we find in our own minds, nor any thing analogous to it: and that, therefore, he is not displeased with the transgression of this law of our natures, nor hath any pleasure or complacency in our obedience: and that we are never to expect any interposition of his to give us tokens of his favour for having pursued that which is right, or of his displeasure for having done what is wrong: that men are, by the laws of nature, thoroughly furnished for serving the purposes of this life; but that this is all that is to be expected; and that by establishing and maintaining this constitution of things, the Creator hath made provision for preserving the world in that state, which will answer his original design.

Very widely different from this way of thinking is the sense of those, who consider the Supreme Being as a lawgiver, and a moral governor, in the proper sense of that word; believing, that as he hath, in the sense of right and wrong, written a law upon the heart of every man, and hath planted in every man a conscience to approve or disapprove of his actions, as they are good or evil; so he is himself attentive to the conduct of every individual; is pleased with the conformity of his temper and actions to the law, that he hath given him, and displeased with the transgressions of it; and will interpose to testify his pleasure or displeasure by such rewards or punishments, as perfect wisdom shall see fit and necessary to answer the end of a moral administration; fit for supporting and encouraging virtue, as the most excellent of all things; for discouraging vice, and so preserving a good order in his own creation. And that, though God doth not interpose in the present state of things by any acts of his, so as fully to answer what reason ultimately expecteth from a perfect moral ruler in rewarding the good and punishing the bad, yet another state of things is to be expected, in which the great design of his moral administration shall

shall be perfected, and he, as judge of the world, will do right to every subject of his moral kingdom.

Now, whether the Supreme Being doth or doth not act the part of such a ruler, is an inquiry unquestionably of the utmost consequence. If men believe, that he doth act it, then there is an unspeakable weight laid into the scale of virtue, additional to all considerations of the beauty and excellency of it, and of the present advantages annexed to it in the pleasing approbation of conscience, and the happy fruits of it, with respect to health, character, and estate. And there is nothing, which can so effectually deter men from vice, as a thorough persuasion, that thereby they displease their Maker and Supreme Ruler, and that he will one day interpose to make them sensible of this, by inflicting punishment proportioned to their crimes. And as the dread of this must give great pain to the disobedient, so from a sense of God's moral government, and a consciousness of being the objects of his favour, the most pleasing and joyful hopes spring up to the virtuous and good. So that all men must be affected, and conduct themselves in a very different manner, as they do or do not believe, that God acteth the part of a moral ruler over them.

That in this great argument every man, who will attend to the first principles of reason and morality, may come to a satisfactory decision in his own mind, let us begin with those things, which are most simple and plain, and try, how far clear and sound reasoning will carry us toward a proof, that God doth act the part of such a moral ruler.

Every man findeth, that he himself, his powers and faculties, his temper, instinct, and inclinations, are the objects of his reflecting thoughts, and of various operations of his understanding, and affections of the heart. And surely no man can imagine, that the Creator of all hath not this reflecting power, by

which his existence and his perfections become the objects of his own contemplation.

Again we know, that in the powers and faculties conferred upon us, and in the instincts and affections, which are planted in the heart, we have a perception of excellency, that is delightful to us. Some things, in our frame and constitution, we esteem, as they are of great use in life ; other things are not only useful, but in themselves lovely. And must we not likewise believe, that the Supreme Being hath a perception of excellency in his own perfections ? Or doth it not appear most shocking absurdity to ascribe to him perfection in the highest possible degree, and at the same time to suppose, that he discerneth no excellency in it ! the most glorious state of existence possible, and yet no sense of this, nor delight resulting from the contemplation of it ! The mind immediately pronounceth this the most unnatural of all conceptions.

Let us apply this particularly to the goodness of God. We see the plain footsteps of goodness in all his works. We discern it in the kind and good affections, which are planted in the heart of man : we see it in innumerable things, with which providence hath furnished us, which are not at all necessary for the support of life, but contrived merely for our delight : we discern in the general system of things about us, which doth not manifest any thing like a design formed and carried on, to make living creatures miserable, but directly the reverse of this, seeing the laws of nature, without exception, do all tend to the good and happiness of the creation. Now goodness ever appeareth to our minds excellent and lovely. And as we clearly perceive, that God is good, and have reason to ascribe goodness to him in its highest perfection, can it enter into the heart of man, that he hath not a perception of excellency, that he doth not delight in his own perfect goodness ? Will any man say, that it is not in its nature most excellent and lovely ? And shall we imagine, that the
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supreme most perfect mind doth not discern this? But if he hath a perception of excellency in goodness, and loveth it, surely that, which is contrary to goodness, and is therefore discerned to be unlovely or deformed, must be the object of his aversion.

To say, that God hath no perception of excellence in his goodness, and that he hath no delight in the contemplation of it, is to say, that he is incapable of the highest happiness, of which we have any idea: not only so, but that he is incapable of that happiness, which he hath actually communicated to his creatures, and which is the most perfect enjoyment of being: an happiness, which surely cannot be incompatible with the highest perfection, but which, indeed, according to all our ideas and reasonings, necessarily springeth from it. In the same manner, we may reason concerning any quality or disposition in the divine mind, that falleth under a moral consideration, as becoming, as lovely, as right, the contrary to which is wrong.

Farther, as God hath planted in his creatures a power, by which they apprehend what is good and right, and approve it; and condemn what is evil and wrong: it is certain, that he must himself *know* what is good and right, what is evil and wrong. For he must necessarily know that, of which he hath given to his creatures a clear perception. And if so, and at the same time he is utterly regardless of right and wrong, this is not only not what reason directeth us to suppose in the most perfect mind, but it is that, from which we cannot separate the idea of *depravity*, and the greatest imperfection; an insensibility to, an utter negligence of, good and evil, of right and wrong, appearing clearly to the mind! Doth not this carry in it the idea of the greatest defect possible? And will ever nature, will ever the heart of man, suggest any such thing, with respect to the original of all excellency and perfection?

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Let this, then, be fixed in the first place; that God hath a perception of excellency in his own goodness and righteousness; that he is delighted and happy in them; and that whatsoever is contrary to them, must be to him disagreeable, and the object of dislike and aversion. And when this is fixed as a principle not to be contested, it will be perfectly clear to the mind, as a consequence from it, that God hath planted in the heart of man the sense of right and wrong, not merely to serve certain purposes in his creation, which were necessary to the accomplishment of his own great design, without being himself at all affected by any such sense; but that he hath given it as a law, with our obedience to which he cannot but be pleased, as he must be displeased with our negligence of it, and our transgressions against it. If he hath complacency in his own moral perfection, he must necessarily have complacency in those moral agents, who, by obeying his laws, became, according to the measure of their capacity, conformable to it; and they, who do not so obey, must necessarily fall under his displeasure. And every man will see it is impossible, that a being, who perceiveth excellency in goodness, and deformity in evil; to whom the former, as such, is lovely, and the latter hateful, should not regard moral agents, who do that, which is good, with approbation and love, with dislike and displeasure, those who do evil.

What, that can be called perfection, could we ascribe to a being, who had no respect to good and evil, to right and wrong, in his conduct? Without this *respect* there is no such thing as excellency or worth at all. On the contrary, in having it to the highest perfection, according to all our ideas and apprehensions, the highest excellency consisteth. And surely nothing can be more unnatural, than to believe that the Supreme Being, who governeth the whole universe, and who hath made a multitude of creatures capable of discerning right and wrong, will
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support that respect to this distinction, which constituteth a right moral character, and which maketh his creatures resemble his own perfection.

Hence it will be evident, that the perfect goodness of God is not to be considered as a principle of action exerting itself indiscriminately, to communicate all possible pleasure and happiness to his creatures, without regard to moral characters. To do so, might, in some sense, be called goodness; but it could not possibly consist with that distinction between moral agents, as by doing that, which is good, they become necessarily the objects of divine approbation, or by doing evil they become necessarily the objects of displicence; which distinction God will ever maintain, and which his own unchangeable perfection maketh it impossible for him to neglect.

In this the foundation is laid of a moral government, under which the good, and obedient to the laws, which God hath given them, are not only assured of being the objects of his approbation and favour, but have reason to expect, that he, who is the sovereign ruler of the universe, will testify his approbation, by taking care of, and making them happy: and the disobedient and wicked have reason to apprehend, that they shall suffer under his displeasure. This is what nature directeth us to look for from a perfect moral ruler, and that he will, by certain acts of his own, reward the good and dutiful, and punish transgressors. Here it is to be considered, that, in the present state of things, God hath established a constitution, by which he hath annexed joy and delight to the practice of righteousness, and manifold other advantages, with respect to health, reputation, and estate; and so ordered things, that the sinner shall be exposed to suffering, in these respects, by his own perverse ways; and we frequently see great misery the natural and unavoidable consequence of vice. This constitution is of very great moment, and indeed, in some respects, the principal thing

thing in the divine administration, and sheweth evidently, that the Supreme Being is a friend to virtue; and therein we discover most important steps of a moral government. For while that constitution remaineth, virtue will be, in a great measure, reward, and vice punishment to itself. But surely this is not all, that is to be expected under a perfect moral administration. For if God should no otherwise interpose to testify his pleasure or displeasure, as his subjects have or have not obeyed his laws, it would be just the same thing, as if there were no superintendent of our conduct and actions at all. And if we should suppose, that such a constitution, once framed, could subsist without any attention of the author to it, or care of it, or any interposition of his whatsoever; it would be the same thing, as if there were no God at all. A perfect moral government implieth in it, that the Supreme Ruler is attentive to every individual, and that as he is pleased or displeased with the moral conduct, so he will by certain acts make his pleasure or displeasure most sensibly manifest; so that the dutiful and obedient shall find themselves gainers by having rendered themselves the objects of his favour, and the rebellious shall suffer under his displeasure.

For the illustration of this, let it be attended to, that there are many things the objects of our hopes, and fears, which are intirely the sovereign power of God, and are not at all connected with, or dependent upon, that original constitution, that hath been mentioned, in which many advantages are annexed to the practice of virtue, and disadvantages and sufferings to vice. Such are, principally, the continuance or extinction of our being, which is a matter, that lieth at the foundation of all. And such are all the favours and blessings, and all the evils and calamities, which, by divine providence, are appointed in our lot, quite independent of our conduct; and yet no man but must be sensible, that his state, with respect
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to happiness or misery, may be greatly affected by them. Now from God, considered as a perfect moral ruler, such an attention to individuals is to be expected, that in determining those matters, which are wholly in his sovereign power, and quite independent of any agency of ours, he should shew, that he loveth and approveth of the good, and is displeased with the wicked; and that the administration should be such, that, without exception, men should receive according to their works. Particularly, if we are at present deep sufferers by studying to do our duty, and to please our Maker; if we meet with persecution in character, estate, or life, by wicked oppressors, nature directeth us to hope, that he, as sovereign Lord and Judge, will interpose to redress our grievances, and right our wrongs; and that he will not permit unrighteousness finally to triumph in our sufferings. And if we saw a most distressful lot appointed by providence for a person of worth, while the wicked flourished in all imaginable prosperity, we should expect such a turn, as would compensate for the sufferings of the righteous, and make it manifest, that God was his friend; while the wicked should find, that, notwithstanding his past prosperity, he was really an object of disobedience to his Maker. And we should most assuredly expect, that whatever became of the bad and the vicious, the governor of the world would not destroy the beings of such as obeyed, and made it their study to please him; but that he would continue them in existence, and that in such a state, as would give opportunity and encouragement to the practice of righteousness, the most excellent thing in his creation.

Such is the language of nature concerning the government of God; and violence must be done to nature, and the sentiments of the heart opposed, when men go into contrary schemes. Who can stand by it, as a thing, that appeareth natural and rational, that God doth not perceive an excellency in his own good-

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ness, and righteousness, and truth; that these are not objects of delightful contemplation to him, and the contrary disagreeable? Or that he knoweth right and wrong, good and evil; but with the clearest perception of them, is quite insensible to them, without all approbation of the one or disapprobation of the other; and doth not act with any respect to them, considered as excellent, or the contrary? That he hath planted a sense of right and wrong in the hearts of his creatures, to be the rule of their conduct; but is neither pleased or displeased with them, on account of their acting or not acting agreeably to this law? That the most affectionate and dutiful are not, on account of their being so, the more the objects of his favour; nor the most wicked and abandoned rendered, on account of their crimes, the more the objects of his displeasure? Or that, supposing the former should be the objects of his favour, and others the objects of his displeasure, yet he will never interpose to make them sensible of this; and that, though he hath all power and authority, and perfectly knoweth every individual, yet the best and most worthy shall not, by any interposition or act of his, after having at first formed a constitution of nature, be the better for his love; nor the state of the worthless the worse for his displeasure? That oppressed righteousness shall never be taken into his protection; nor triumphant wickedness suffer under his censure? These are sentiments, which the reason and heart of man can never embrace. They are not only repugnant to all our ideas of divine perfection, but indeed inconsistent with that regard to virtue, which we evidently see in the original constitution of nature.

But as, in these observations and reflections, I have endeavoured to point out the foundations, upon which we believe God's moral government of the world; so it hath been intimated, that, in the present state of things, the design and scheme of a perfect moral administration is not compleated; that is,

we do not see such a distinction in all respects made between the good and the bad, as, under a government perfectly righteous and impartial, we might rationally expect. The original constitution of nature, and the laws of it, which are so friendly to virtue, have been taken notice of. But with respect to the distribution of the favours of providence, which have no connexion with virtue, nor are the natural fruit and result of it, we see, that the distinction between the good and bad is not, in every instance, observed; nay, the distributions of providence are, in a great measure, promiscuous. It is an old and just observation, that no man *knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him*; * *that all things come alike to all*; *that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and bad, to the clean and the unclean, to him that sacrificeth, and to him, that sacrificeth not*; *as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that sweareth, as he, that feareth an oath*. And agreeably to this, the Psalmist observeth, † *that the wicked prosper*; *that there are no bands in their death, that their strength is firm, they are not troubled like other men, neither are they plagued like others*. *Their eyes stand out with fat, they have more than their hearts could wish*. *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world*; *they increase in riches*. On the other hand, it is often seen, that the best and worthiest persons suffer under deep calamity, such as sickness and disorder of body, penury and want, reproach and contempt. And what is most of all to be considered, is, that in innumerable instances they have suffered extremely, even to death, by doing justice to their own consciences, and obeying the laws of their Maker. They have been, in the course of providence, delivered into the hands of cruel persecutors, who have put them to exquisite torments, and to death. ‡ *They have had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds*

* Eccles. ix. 1, 2. † Psal. lxxiii. 3, 4, 5, 7, 12. ‡ Heb. xi. 36—39.

and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, were destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. All, who are acquainted with the history of the world, know, that men, who would be dutiful and loyal to the Supreme Ruler, have been often exposed to such sufferings as these, and have lost life, and, upon supposition, that death is the utter extinction of it, have lost *being*, in the support and defence of the cause of truth and righteousness. Now are these events, which we would expect under a perfect moral administration? Are they consistent with the very first principles concerning God's love of, and regard to, virtue; and his displeasure at vice, upon supposition that the scene is intirely closed in this world? Under a perfect moral administration, is virtue, in any one instance, in any one individual, to be finally unhappy? Are the wrongs and grievances of the good and righteous, those wrongs which they suffer in the cause of righteousness, and for the sake of it, never to be redressed? And is wickedness finally to triumph over oppressed worth and integrity? Can it be so under a perfect moral administration, which will render to every man according to his works? No: this is a thing, which cannot be received as truth; nor ever will sit easy upon the mind. And what are we then to believe? That the case is as hath been represented; that virtue, in innumerable instances, doth suffer deeply, even to death, without any interposition of the Supreme power in its favour, is evident. That, therefore, the design of a moral administration is not perfected in this world, is apparent. What are we then to conclude? That God doth not act the part of a moral governor at all? This, we have seen, is utterly irrational, and inconsistent with all our ideas of divine perfection. What can remain, then, but

that we conclude, that the scene is not closed in the present state of things; and that we shall exist after death, and in that state of existence, the scheme of a moral government, of which we evidently see the foundations laid in this world, shall be carried on to perfection. This is that, in which we must rest. This the heart immediately embraceth, as the only clear solution of all the difficulties, with which, upon any other hypothesis, we are embarrassed.

Many are the arguments, which have been offered for the immortality of the soul, taken from the nature of it as an immaterial substance, from the extent of its powers and faculties, and the improvement without end, of which it is capable; from that, which is manifestly the supreme good of such a creature, and which hath no necessary connection with the enjoyments of mere animal life. But indeed the strongest and most satisfying argument, which reason affordeth, seems to be taken from God's moral government. If he acteth the part of a moral ruler at all, we cannot doubt, but that his government will be most perfect, and under which no individual will find just reason to complain. But if there be one single instance, in which a person perisheth in support and defence of the cause of truth and righteousness, this cannot be the case; there would then be a foundation for complaint. God hath planted in the heart of man certain principles, by which he intended the conduct should be regulated. In acting upon these principles, and doing the will of God, men have often been obliged to give up all temporal possessions and enjoyments, and even life itself. These they must have parted with; or have violated their own consciences, and acted in contradiction to the will of God. And yet under a perfect moral administration, under which these sacrifices in the cause of virtue must be had in the highest estimation, they are to have no real redress for this suffering, but sink at death into non-existence; and are not at all distinguished

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guished from the most worthless and abandoned character. Every impartial and attentive person will immediately judge, that it is impossible, that this should be the case; or that the expectations, which we cannot avoid forming upon the principles in this discourse laid down, should be all mere delusion, and that we should be finally cheated, even to the loss of our existence, by cleaving to that, which, according to our present frame, must appear to us above all things excellent, lovely, and pleasing to our Maker. If then there be a perfect moral government, there must be a future state. If we give up the latter, we must give up the former. And indeed every one, who will candidly weigh the arguments for it, will be so convinced, that nothing, but a demonstration of the impossibility of our existing after death, could make him believe, that, at death, the scene is intirely closed; and surely no man will undertake to demonstrate this. Is it not most natural, indeed unavoidable, for oppressed virtue, suffering under vexatious persecution and ill usage of every kind, suffering torments and death, to look up to the power above as its sanctuary, to look for redress and deliverance? And the mind could be overwhelmed by nothing, so much as an imagination, that there is no such power, or that no friendship or protection is to be expected from it. To be persuaded of this, must make the world appear a gloomy scene indeed, and the great family of God, as if it had no head, seeing those purposes of government, which are the most material should not be at all answered.

Nay, in what sense at all can God be said to be the governor of moral agents, if he hath no regard to their actions, as good or evil? And they are therefore, to have no respect at all to him, from whom, however they conduct life, they are to expect neither love nor hatred, have nothing to hope, nothing to fear, and so may be said, in truth, to have nothing to do with him. And there really seemeth

to be no medium, either we must regard God as our moral, with whom, therefore, we have a very near, and the most important of all connection; or else think and act, as if there were no God at all over us. And what is of the utmost importance in this matter, is, that our constitution naturally leads us to fall in with this conception of God, as our moral ruler, to whom we are always accountable. Whereas, by entertaining conceptions of an intelligent being, who is the cause of all things, and who hath given us the sense of right and wrong, and yet doth not at all regard our moral conduct, the utmost violence is done to our natural conceptions of the order of the moral world, the mind is intirely unhinged, and is lost in confusion and dissatisfaction.

Now what nature and reason suggest concerning the government of God, we find fully established, and confirmed in the holy scriptures, where, by express revelation, we are assured, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to his works. Under the Jewish administration, which was of a very peculiar kind, the sanctions of the divine law were taken from temporal things. Prosperity was promised to that people, while they were obedient to the laws of God; and great adversity was threatened, if they should be rebellious against him. And that whole oeconomy did plainly suppose an extraordinary interposition, peculiar to the Jews. But that dispensation is now superseded. Our Blessed Saviour hath introduced a religion fitted and designed to be universal; and all the sanctions of his laws are taken from the world to come. He hath brought life and immortality for the righteous clearly to light, and hath pointed out a state of punishment for the rebellious and impenitent. * He teacheth us, that there cometh a time, when the servants of God, and the subjects of his kingdom, shall be called to an account for their improvement

* Mat. xxv. 14. and Luke xix. 12.

of the talents, wherewith they have been intrusted ; and that while the slothful and wicked servant shall be rejected and punished, the dutiful, and he, who was attentive to his master's will, and to the business allotted to him, shall be accepted and rewarded ; and that in proportion to the improvement he hath made, when the great judge cometh, he will call all mankind to an account. * He will separate them according to their real characters, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats ; that the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. † He teacheth, that they, who suffer for righteousness sake, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, and that upon this account their sufferings may be matter of real and exceeding joy to them. ‡ And that the righteous shall hereafter shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their father. § He sheweth us, that they only shall be accepted of God, who do his will ; and that all hopes, founded upon any thing else, is building upon the sand. The sacred writers, after him, assure us of the same things ; || *That to them, who by a patient continuance in well doing, seek after glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life shall be given ; and that to them, who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish, are in reserve, to every soul of man, who doth evil, whether of Jew or Gentile, for there is no respect of persons with God. ¶ That the wicked shall not inherit the kingdom of God ; neither fornicators nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves nor covetous, nor extortioners, nor revilers, nor drunkards, shall inherit that kingdom. But that for them, who have finished their course happily there is a crown of righteousness in reserve, which God, the righteous judge will give to all them, who love his appearance. That ** as a man soweth, so shall he also*

* Mat. xxv. 31. † Mat. v. 10. ‡ Mat. xiii. 43. § See Mat. vii. 21, 29. || Rom. ii. 6. 12. ¶ 1 Cor. vi. 9. ** Gal vi. 7.

reap: He, who soweth to the spirit, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he, who soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. That we ought not to be weary of well-doing; *for in due time we shall reap, if we faint not.* And as the holy scriptures clearly point out a future state, which shall be a state of rewards and punishments, so they use the very strongest expressions and the most significant metaphors, to set forth the happiness of the righteous, and the sufferings of the wicked and finally impenitent.

But as mankind are all of them chargeable with guilt and great moral imperfections, and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, so repentance and remission of sins are preached in the name of Christ to all nations; and we know, that if the unrighteous forsaketh his way, and *turneth to the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon him* *; and that † *there is no condemnation to them, who are in Christ Jesus the Lord, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.* We are likewise clearly informed, that not sinless perfection, but sincerity, is the term of our acceptance with God. And we have all possible encouragement to obedience, from the great and precious promises of the assurance of God's holy spirit, and that he will always countenance and encourage our good attempts, and give us effectual aid. In a word, we are assured, that all, who come up to the terms of acceptance declared in the gospel, shall be acquitted in the great day of judgment.

In all this the gospel speaketh language, which must be perfectly agreeable and pleasing to every ingenuous mind. And therein we have the authority of God expressly interposed to establish our faith of his moral government, and to point out clearly the measures of his administration, which must to all, who are unprejudiced, appear most worthy of his spotless purity, and infinite goodness; and which proceed with that regard to true worth and holiness,

* If. iv. 7.

† Rom. viii. 1.

which is due to that, which, in the judgment of all, who can discern, must be the most excellent of all things. Indeed this may be said to be the only thing, which is excellent, in as much as nothing is truly so, but by deriving from it. Power and understanding, in the utmost extent, separate from goodness and rectitude, must appear great and dreadful; but they are not lovely: it is by their being under the influence of goodness, that they become amiable. And if we separate from any being, any character, righteousness and goodness, there remaineth nothing in our idea of it, which the mind pronounceth to be excellent. Thus I have endeavoured to explain to you the foundations of God's moral government, and shall now make some practical reflections upon the subject.

First, it must undoubtedly be matter of great joy to every well-disposed and good mind, that righteousness is constantly the object of principal attention to the Supreme Being; that it will be constantly under his care and protection; that however it may suffer in the present state of imperfection and discipline, yet it shall be finally happy; and that while we have the testimony of conscience to our sincere endeavours to conduct life according to the law originally written upon our hearts, and the precepts given us in the word of God, studying to correct whatsoever we know to have been amiss in us, and to cultivate every worthy and good disposition of soul, we shall be the objects of our Maker's love and complacential regard, that he will take care of our interests, and make us for ever happy. That as the rules and measures of his administration are unalterable, and he ever will do what is right, so in all events it will be well with the righteous. Were it not so, and we should suppose, that the Supreme Ruler did not love righteousness, and would not take care of it, in what a melancholy light must the universe appear to a virtuous mind? What a painful reflection, that, what he cannot

not but account the most excellent thing in the creation of God, should be neglected? That in the eye of the parent of the universe, right and wrong, good and evil, the very best and the very worst moral character, made no difference with respect to his regard and favour. These are things, which must greatly discourage the votaries of virtue, and make way for the prevalence of all irregular and vicious passions. For who but must imagine, that the planting in the heart of man a sense of excellency in virtue, was intended as a mere delusion, if it is supposed, that the Almighty Governor of the world maketh no account of it? And what man would be esteemed to act a wise part, in suffering for the sake of virtue and of conscience, in losing his very being in that cause? Nay, if there is no regard in the power, who governeth all, to right and wrong, who could form any judgment of his administration? And what rule could we have for directing our expectations from it? On the contrary, how pleasing to think, that he, who governeth all, is perfectly and unchangeably good and holy; that he will ever act the part of a friend to righteousness; that the whole of his administration will be regulated with an eye to it, and that his almighty power will ever be engaged in the support and defence of it? How pleasing to think, that as his eye is upon every individual, so he will graciously notice and reward every good action; that the least thing, done from good and worthy principles, shall not be over-looked, shall not be forgotten? How perfectly in character did our Blessed Saviour speak, when he said, ** Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward?* It is very comfortable to think, that by doing that, which is good, we become the objects of our Maker's esteem and love. This above all things gratifieth that desire of honour, which is so natural to the human heart, and pre-

* Matt. x. 42.

vaileth most in the most ingenuous minds. But to know farther, that virtue and true holiness will be the object of our Maker's care, and that in all events he will provide, that it shall be well with the righteous, is the very strongest encouragement to the practice of righteousness, which can be given. As on the other hand, what can so effectually deter men from vice, as to know, that by doing that, which is evil, they fall under the displeasure of the Supreme Being, that they shall not go unpunished; but have such penalties inflicted upon them, as are necessary to serve the purposes of his perfect moral administration. In a word, as there is, in this administration, the most perfect and beautiful order, so without it, there is nothing which could be called order, and we could have no security of happiness in existence. For surely an indiscriminating goodness could give us no such security, a goodness exerted consistently with all the oppression of the virtuous, and all the malignity of the bad and vicious, and making no distinction between them.

It is a strong presumption in favour of the religion of Christ, as a religion of divine authority, that it hath so clearly and fully established the belief of God's moral government. What we are led to by the principles of reason and morality, is fully explained and brought home to the heart of every man by the Christian revelation. Hereby every man is enabled to judge, whether he is, or is not, the object of his Maker's favour; and whether he is to look for reward or punishment, happiness or misery, in the world to come. And having mentioned this strong presumption in favour of Christianity, give me leave farther to observe, that the opposition, which hath been made to the religion of Christ, and attempts to overthrow the authority of it, may be owing, partly at least, to the lusts of men, those irregular and impure lusts, which cannot bear the severity of the Christian discipline, and must be ever at enmity with the purity of the Christian spirit. Where men have

not learned to deny themselves, but will indulge in unlawful gratifications, the Christian religion will stand grievously in their way, as it presenteth to their minds future scenes exceedingly awful, a righteous judgment to come, and severe punishment in reserve for the wicked and impenitent. But should such persons be able to overthrow, in their own judgments, the authority of that religion, they are never the nearer their great purpose of providing for the tranquillity of their minds in vicious courses, while they have reason to believe God's moral government of the world. To make themselves quite easy, it is necessary, that they should get the better of all the principles of natural religion, as well as of Christianity. And this is a thing never to be done. These principles have such a foundation in reason and nature, and in the sense of right and wrong, that, till this is intirely exterminated, all their attempts must be vain. And on the other hand, no man, who believeth God's government, and can be pleased, and think himself happy, under such an administration, but must be a friend to the religion of Christ, and with the universal prevalence of the true spirit of it. And if any man, should be capable of rooting out of his mind all the principles of natural religion, and of exterminating the sense of good and evil, of right and wrong, intirely; what a state he must be in? lost to all sense of excellency, and beauty in life! lost to all human enjoyment! incapable of being esteemed or beloved! not disposed to confer, unworthy of receiving any favour! Words cannot describe it.

But, in the second place, as we do all profess most firmly to believe our maker's moral government, let us act a part worthy of such a persuasion. Setting God ever before us, let us endeavour, in all respects, to approve ourselves to him, accounting it not only our unquestionable duty, but our highest interest to do those things which are pleasing, and avoiding, as the very greatest evil, whatsoever is displeasing in his sight.

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What can our principal business in human life be, but to do the will of God? If this great point is not attended to, what can our labours and diligence in any other matters avail to the true ends and purposes of our being? How ridiculous, and absurd an appearance that person maketh, who employeth himself in every thing else, but of his proper business is utterly negligent! *And let no man deceive us; he who doth righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Our religion, to answer the declared end, must consist in that temper and course of life, which is an imitation of God; it must consist in purity, in chastity, in the fruits of the spirit, which are goodness, righteousness, and truth. These are the things, which make men meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. And that religion, which is summed up in the love of God and charity, is what faith was intended to produce; and is the great design of the gospel, in which sincere Christians *with * open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.* And it is the most manifest abuse of the gospel, and of the goodness and mercy of God, made manifest in it, to misrepresent it so, that it shall be understood to undermine the foundations of true morality, and of that government, under which every individual shall be accepted or rejected, according to his real character, and shall reap as he hath sowed. Believe it, there must be repentance from dead works, there must be holiness of heart, and life, there must be the love of God, there must be an intire character formed; or we cannot rationally hope for acceptance. This is the language of nature, as well as of the holy scriptures every where.

Thirdly, for such as continue in a wicked course of life, how awful the apprehensions, which arise from the moral government of God! They are unquestionably, the objects of his displeasure; and this

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

will be made manifest to them, one day, in the most sensible manner. They may, for a while, flourish, and have all that heart can wish; but it will not be always so. The holy scriptures, as I have already observed, give us very strong representations of the misery of bad men, in a state of punishment. And what penalties, what degrees of punishment, it may be fit for the righteous judge of the world to inflict, that the ends of a perfect moral administration may be answered, who can tell? I am afraid, some persons greatly impose upon themselves, in this matter, not willing to admit the thoughts of any thing, which to them appeareth severe in the divine administration. They know, that God is infinitely merciful and good; that it is impossible he should have pleasure in the misery of his creatures; and that it is no way probable, that there should be such grievous sufferings of bad men hereafter, as some would persuade them to believe. To this it may be answered: that God cannot have pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures; that is, cannot have pleasure, merely in putting them to pain, is most certain; and that he is infinitely good and merciful, we see from the whole of his administration, and especially, we see it in the gospel. But at the same time, it is no less certain, that he will make a distinction between the good and the bad, the obedient and rebellious against his authority; and that he will be just, and true to himself, as the supreme ruler, in answering, in the most perfect manner, the ends of his government; and what punishment infinite wisdom may see fit and necessary to these ends, he will inflict upon the wicked, and impenitent. In truth, nothing can be more terrible to wicked men, than the certainty we have, that God ruleth in perfect righteousness. Were we to imagine any thing capricious in his administration, any thing, which could be called humour, or passion, there might be hope, that, sometimes, at least, it might take a turn, favourable to the bad. But when there is nothing done,

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done, but what is perfectly righteous, no punishment inflicted, but what perfect wisdom directeth, and what perfect goodness approveth, we are sure, that the righteous Lord will be inflexible in it, and that his measures will never vary. Notwithstanding his infinite goodness, of which we have the clearest and most satisfying proof, yet we see, that in this World, there have been dreadful instances of suffering and misery, in the course of providence, inflicted upon his creatures. In the sacred history, we meet with many very awful and affecting accounts of this kind, in which God is said, to have intended the punishment, for wicked generations of men, or of particular persons. And in other history, we meet with frequent instances of dreadful calamities, befalling nations, families, and individuals. All these are consistent with the most perfect goodness of the supreme ruler; and this shews, that goodness, in its utmost extent and perfection, may admit of severity, especially, in inflicting proper punishments upon the wicked and rebellious; and shews what may be expected in that state, which is expressly declared to be a state of retribution. This ought to be carefully attended, to and deeply impressed upon our minds.

And I am sure it highly concerneth us, to deal very impartially with ourselves, in searching and trying our ways, and judging, whether our state be such, as to render us the objects of God's favour and approbation, or of his displeasure. And there are very plain reasons laid down to us in the holy scriptures, by which we may form this judgment; and if we are in a state of favour with God, may attain to comfortable satisfaction concerning it. But should deliberate and impartial enquiries end in a conviction, that our moral state is bad, and that we are not in favour with God; what remaineth, but repentance from dead works, as the only thing, that can make an alteration in our state for the better? Repentance, by which I mean a real and thorough change of the temper

temper and life, from evil to good, a thorough reformation. Let me, in conclusion, recommend to your most serious thoughts the affecting expressions of the Prophet *Jeremiah*, speaking in the name of God concerning the part, which he acteth as the governor of the world, *chap. ix. ver. 24.* Thus saith the Lord; let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might: let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him, that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XIV.

The Doctrine of a Particular Providence
considered.

[F O S T E R .]

REV. xix. 6.

Alleluiah : *For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

THE doctrine of a supreme and universal providence is not only the immediate support of all religion, but also the most elevated and delightful object of contemplation, that can possibly present itself to a sober and uncorrupted mind. Upon the truth or falshood of this most important principle, necessarily depends the just idea of the *universe*, and of our own *situation* and *character*, our *design*, our *business*, and all our *expectations* in it. As this grand question is decided, the whole system of nature must appear with a quite *different* face. If the notion of a providence cannot be maintained, the world, to the eye of *reason*, must seem like a *forlorn* and *desolate* wilderness; and we know not to what infinite *irregularities*, to what unavoidable *confusions* and *miseries* it may be exposed,—*horrible* even in the *bare imagination*. It has lost its vital animating spirit; the hope of the *afflicted*, and the main support and consolation of the *virtuous*, are taken away from them; and

the happiness of *all rational beings* is rendered absolutely uncertain and precarious. But if the government of an all-perfect mind be once firmly established; if he conducts the course of nature, and regulates the affairs of the universe with *invariable* wisdom and rectitude, with *impartial* equity, with *paternal* goodness; from hence must naturally spring tranquility, and a *sedate sublime* satisfaction: there can be no improper or unnecessary *evil* upon the whole; nor the want of any fit and necessary *good*.

And yet, notwithstanding this, wicked men, being irreconcilably *averse* to the notion of a providence (because they justly apprehend that it involves in it the idea of *moral* government, the *eternal terror* of vice and wilful depravity) and men of bold and presumptuous speculations, who are bewildered in the intricacies and mazes of blind *metaphysics*; both of these, I say, the one from the corruption of their hearts, and the other from the pride of false wisdom, have endeavoured to banish *God* out of the universe, whose *presence*, and *supreme influence* in it, is the only source of substantial comfort and joy to the intelligent part of the creation.

And *what is it*, that they have substituted in the place of *God*; in the place of an all-wise and omnipotent director and disposer of events, and a common father? Nothing, in effect, but the utmost *anarchy* and wild *disorder*; nothing, in reality, but *unintelligible jargon*, and words without a meaning. For it is to *fate*, or *chance*, that we are referred for the *origin* of the universe, the *support* of its stupendous frame, the *beauty* and *harmony* of the several parts of it, and for the *exquisite contrivance*, the *exact* and *regular disposition* of all things in it.

But let us not, my brethren, suffer ourselves to be lost in darkness; let us not give up *first principles*, for the sake of *sounds* that we do not understand. Let us ask ourselves seriously—what is that *fate*, which is supposed to have such a surprizing kind of

operation, and to produce so many curious and wonderful effects.---“ Is it a *real principle* ?---Is it a *pro-*
“ *per efficient cause* ?---So far from it that we shall
“ find it, upon close examination, to be in the pre-
“ sent argument just *nothing* at all ; *i. e.* “ to be *no*
“ *reason* of the existence of *any thing*, nor capable of
“ affording a solid and satisfactory *account*, of the
“ most *minute* and *trivial* event in nature.”

For when it is said that all things exist, and that the fabric of the world is upheld and maintained, by *fate*, these propositions can be interpreted in no other sense than this, that the universe *exists necessarily* ; and “ that it is absolutely *impossible* that *we ourselves*, or “ any other the most *inconsiderable* part of it, should “ *not* have existed ; and that whatever *is* could not “ *but* happen in *all* respects as it does ; and that, not “ from considerations of *wisdom* and the *greater good* “ upon the whole, but from some principles *essential* “ to it, and *inherent* in its very nature.” But is there the least *colour* of reason for this absurd and extravagant paradox ? Do not all our ideas, do not our very first reflections, assure us of the contrary ? Is it a contradiction (*absolutely* and *abstractly* considered) to assert, that this *earth*, for example, might never have *existed*, or that it might have been *placed* in a *different* part of space, or that it may be entirely *annihilated* ? Nay, is it a contradiction to suppose, that the *meanest insect* in it might either *not* have been, or may *cease* to be ? What principle of reason *is it*, that this may be said to *contradict* ? What certain notion have we, to which it is *impossible* to be *reconciled* ? We all know that there is *none* at all ; and even the *fatalist* himself must be convinced of this, if he would consult and examine his own *ideas*. And can that exist by an intrinsic and immutable *necessity* in nature, which, considered *in itself*, might, upon all our principles of judging and reasoning, either *never* have been *brought* into existence, or have been *confined* or *limited*, as to the *period* of its existence ? If a thing exists

exists necessarily, must not some *precise mode* of its existence be also necessary? If we assert the contrary, is not this the same in effect with saying, "That it is *not* necessary it should exist in *any* way, and yet *that it is* necessary it should exist in *some* way?" Or, if some *particular mode* of being be absolutely and essentially necessary, as it must surely be where the *existence itself* is necessary, how shall we *account* for what we constantly see and experience---That most parts of the universe, which are exposed to our observation, are in a continual *flux*? How shall we *account* for the innumerable *changes* and *variations* to which the constitution of nature is subject? These are indeed inexplicable *mysteries*, glaring contradictions even to common sense: From whence it appears, that the scheme of the *fatalist* is a blind and bewildered scheme, and utterly insufficient to explain both the *original*, and the *general laws* and *course* of nature.

What then is *chance*?---Why it is not only *no cause*, but, in the strict notion of it, directly *repugnant* to the very *idea* of *casualties*. For if there be any *adequate cause*, of the existence and order of the world, subsisting, we are able from hence to give a *certain*, and *determinate reason* of its existence and order; and, of consequence, it could not be formed by *chance*, nor can the affairs and concerns of it be directed and regulated by *chance*. But, on the contrary, if all this be entirely *fortuitous*, it as undeniably follows, that the universe can be nothing else but a series of *effects* without a *cause*, "or without any *proportionate power*, "existing in nature, to *produce* these effects." Besides,--can chance give *uniform* laws to nature? Can chance always operate with a *steady* and *unvaried* regularity? Can chance, unintelligent roving chance, act with all the *exactness* of the most consummate and unerring Wisdom? Can it be owing to *this*, that such an infinite number of *different* effects *conspire* in their design and use? Is it to be imputed to *mere chance*, that but very rarely any *irregular* and

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monstrous productions appear in the universe; that we are entertained with the prospect of *general beauty and harmony*; that such a scene of wonders, of incomparable art and skill, is exhibited and displayed before us, as exceeds, I will not say the *imitation*, but even the *comprehension* of all mankind, if it could be collected together and united in *one intellect*? And, to sum up all, must it be ascribed to *mere chance* that we see in the whole system of creation, *nothing else* but marks of the most accurate and stupendous workmanship, and not the *least resemblance* of an accidental and fortuitous production? Whoever can so far impose upon his understanding, as to admit these absurd conclusions, is qualified for being an *infidel* in every thing; and the strongest *improbabilities* are not sufficient to shock his *incredulity*. And yet by such *stupidities* as these, grossly affronting to the Creator and sovereign Lord of universal nature, and insolently contemptuous to the universal reason of mankind; by these, I say, we are to be persuaded to renounce our belief of a Deity, and the *pleasures* and eminent *advantages* resulting from his being and providence, for the *dull*, the *gloomy*, the *comfortless* scheme of atheism. Whereas, in truth, the just inference to be drawn from such extravagant pretensions is evidently this, that since neither *fate* nor *chance* could *make* or *govern* the world, there must of necessity be a *self-existent*, *intelligent*, and *active* principle, the *first cause* of all things, and the *director* and *disposer* of events.

But as it was not my original design to insist on the *general proofs* of a providence, in my remarks on which I have already too much enlarged (tho' I hope they will not be without their use) I shall here put a stop to these reflections; and proceed to consider the principal point intended, *viz. how far* the providence of God may be supposed to *extend*, or, in other words, "*whether, and in what cases, it is reasonable for us to acknowledge a particular providence.*" Which is a point of high importance in forming our sentiments of *religion*, and fixing the true idea of the

state of *the universe* in general, and of *human life*.--- Now in order to avoid confusion, and set this argument in a proper light, it is only necessary that I do these two things. First of all shew briefly, what is meant by a *particular providence*: And secondly, lay before you the strong *probabilities*, that may be urged in *support* of this doctrine.

The first thing to be done is, to enquire briefly what is meant by a *particular providence*. And in order to this, it is proper to shew what is intended by God's *general providence*; which is thought, by many, fully to answer all the purposes both of *natural* and *moral* government, and, of consequence, to exclude a *particular interposition*. It is stated thus---
 " that the infinite and all-wise Creator of the universe
 " formed the constitution of nature so *perfect* at first,
 " as to stand in need of no successive regulation;
 " that he established *certain laws* in the material
 " world, which *uniformly* and *invariably* take place in
 " it; that he endowed it with *intrinsic* powers to
 " produce all the ordinary and regular effects which
 " he ever intended it *should* produce: Just as when
 " an Artificer frames a *machine* for *certain* purposes,
 " and to endure to a *limited* duration; in all which
 " period, the effects, which result from it, spring
 " not from the *immediate* direction and influence of
 " the artist himself, but from the *force* of its own
 " *original* composition." This is the substance of their scheme who are entirely, and *exclusively*, for a general providence: Upon which the following remarks, that are preparatory to the main argument, naturally present themselves.---*First*, that it is impossible to prove from any principles of *reason*, that this is the *actual* state of things. For how can we know that the most common events spring from properties and powers *fixed* and *inherent* in the constitution itself, without being acquainted with its *internal frame*, and with the *proper* and *necessary* effects of all *natural* causes.---But, *Secondly*, it is impossible for

us to prove (if we admit that this is the general state of the case) that it is the *whole* of the case; unless we are sure, that the supreme governor of the world can have *no wise ends* and purposes to serve, but what are perfectly provided for in the *original* disposition and frame of nature.---From whence it follows, in the *third* place, that no conclusive *objection* can be raised, from the *reason* of things, against a *particular* providence; that all the *presumptions* and *probabilities*, which are found to be on the *side* of a *particular* providence, must remain in their full force, being counter-balanced, or even diminished, by *none at all* on the *other* side: And this must render every probability, that can be urged for the doctrine which I am now recommending, so much the more strong and considerable.

But it may still be asked, what is that *particular providence*, which you intend to vindicate? To which I answer, that it consists in this; "that the supreme Being, upon special occasions, *directs* and *over-*rules the course of *events*, both in the natural and moral world, by an *immediate* influence, to answer the great designs of his universal government."---And what reasons there are, to induce us to believe and acknowledge *this*, is the *second* point, that now comes in order to be considered.

In the *first* place then, *no* supposition is, in general, so *honourable* to the perfect wisdom and rectitude of the Deity as this, that upon all occasions, which *require* it, he conducts and guides the *course* of *nature* in such a manner, as to make it subservient to the most *beneficial* purposes.---Nor will this introduce any *appearance* of *confusion* in the universe, because we can easily imagine that the all-perfect Author of it can *suspend*, *moderate*, or *mix* the influence of natural causes, without making any *visible* alteration in the order of nature, or its general established laws. What are the *first springs* of the most *common* events we *know not*; in numberless cases, at least, they are ab-

solutely *imperceptible* by us: And therefore we can never discover, when they are *touched* and *managed* by the supreme disposing mind; it is out of our power, on such occasions as these, to perceive any thing *irregular*, or any thing *uncommon*.

Let me add to confirm this doctrine, in the *second* place, that it may be *questioned*, whether any such laws *could* be *originally* fixed in the universe, as without an *immediate* direction and interposition of the Deity upon some special occasions, can *possibly* answer all the ends of government with respect to *man-kind* in *this life*; considered both as *moral* and *accountable* beings in a state of *trial*, and as united together in *societies*: “For how a *certain* and *necessary* course of things can be compleatly and minutely adapted to the infinitely *various* and *uncertain* passions, designs, and pursuits of *free agents* is extremely hard to be conceived.” Must there then be *no* providence, *no* supreme regulation with respect to *such events* as these? This, surely, is a very unreasonable and obstinate conclusion.

But, farther, *thirdly*, we find that the Creator of the world has put it even in the power of *men*, by a proper *application* and *conjunction* of *several* natural causes, to produce very *surprising*, very *beneficial* effects, “which would *not* have been produced, if these causes had remained *distinct*, as they lie in the *original constitution*, without the interposition of human art and industry.” Is it not, then a most absurd *limitation* of the wisdom and omnipotence of the Deity, (which can bring about infinitely more important events, by a *suitable combination* of various causes, in every part and district of nature; is it not, I say, a most absurd limitation of God’s wisdom and omnipotence, to dispute against *such interpositions* as these (which are all actings of a *particular providence*) when we ourselves can easily conceive, “that the government of the world may, upon *this* supposition, be more *wisely* conducted, and answer many

“ more

"more valuable purposes than it can otherwise do."

---A concurrence of causes united by a skilful direction, but for which union there is perhaps, in innumerable instances, no provision made in nature; such a concurrence of causes, I say, adapted to particular circumstances may be the means of effecting unexpected and great revolutions for the good of society, and of mankind in general. And as these revolutions, and the benefits resulting from them, would in all probability not have taken place, were it not for the exercise of a particular providence; this demonstrates not only how reasonable it is for us to admit it here; but to presume the same in many other cases, where it may be equally necessary, tho' that necessity lies more remote from our dark and limited conceptions.

I shall only add at present, that the Holy Scriptures assert, in the strongest terms, the universal extent of God's providence, and his disposal of all events, throughout the whole scope of created being.---That the Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all—that the highest orders of intelligent spirits have the honour to act as his ministers, to execute his wise and gracious councils—with respect to this globe, that his providence is in a particular manner concerned about mankind, strictly regarding the evil and the good; but that it is not confined to them, but reaches to every part even of the sensitive and inanimate creation: For he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing; not a sparrow falls to the ground without your father; and the very hairs of your head are all numbered---and that with respect to the supreme mind, who comprehends at one view the whole course of things, and perfectly understands the force and efficacy of all natural causes, nothing can be fortuitous and accidental; but what are commonly stiled accidental effects must be as intirely subject to his direction and controul, as the most obvious effects of the plainest necessary causes: For even

even when the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.

This is the doctrine of *revelation*; in which it only confirms, and renders more authoritative, the sense and voice of *nature*. For as, on the one hand, the government of the universe cannot be a task too *difficult* for infinite wisdom and omnipotence to manage; so, on the other, we have the utmost reason to conclude, that nothing will be thought *beneath* the notice and *care* of the Deity, that tends to illustrate the glory of his *moral excellencies*, and especially the amiable glory of his *goodness*, which is the chief perfection even of a supremely intelligent and infinite nature.--- But the more particular discussion of this subject must be reserved to my next discourse.

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DISCOURSE XV.

The Doctrine of a Particular Providence
considered.

[FOSTER.]

REV. xix. 6.

Alleluiah: *For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

THE providence of God being the *support* of the frame and order of the world, and as it were the *life* of universal nature, the devout and joyful *adoration* of it is represented in the text, with the highest propriety as one part of the *employment*, one principal and essential part of the *happiness* of the blessed inhabitants of *heaven*; not only of *man-kind* in this future state of their exaltation and glory, when they shall have their faculties extended, their conceptions more clear, strong, and adequate, and be purged from moral impurities; but also of the most *exalted orders* of intelligent spirits. This describes to us the *best* and *noblest* part of the Creation in its true beauty and rectitude; joining in one uninterrupted and harmonious consort, to celebrate the *universal dominion* of the Almighty, and his *stupendous acts* of government.

Even in *this life*, indeed, we have light enough afforded us to discern in general, that there *is*, and *must be*, a supreme disposal and regulation of events; and
that

that we have the utmost reason to *acquiesce* in the operations of an omnipotent power, when a wisdom that is infinite, and a goodness that is equal, impartial, unconfined, and immutable, always *direct* and *measure* the exertions of it. But with respect to the *scheme* of providence itself, which is so *vast* and *comprehensive*; with respect to the *immediate causes*, and *various uses*, of innumerable effects which we see produced; with respect to the *amplitude* and *order* of the whole design, and the *subordination* and admirable *connection* of its various parts, how many ways *each* may tend to the advancement of it, and frequently, perhaps, by such *obscure* and *far-distant* consequences, as are impossible to be *traced* by a finite understanding: And, to add no more with respect to the *exact proportions* of nature, and the *due temperament* of different causes, by which means they will be brought, in the end, to *terminate* in one grand point, and be *united* in their influence.--- Here, I say, our apprehensions must of necessity be indistinct and confused.

And yet, tho' this be an undeniable truth, and cannot *possibly* be otherwise from the very *nature* of things, it appears to have but little weight in regulating the conduct of mankind. The incomprehensibleness of a subject is no check to their *presumption*; their *cavils* are not easily silenced, even in cases where they have *no principles* of reasoning; they censure because they are *ignorant*; they grow profane and sceptical in proportion as they are *peevish* and *impatient*, in proportion as for want of *ideas*, and thro' a mere blind and childish *resentment*, they are displeased with the *general constitution* of the universe, or dissatisfied with their own *rank* and *circumstances* in it. Whereas, on the contrary, the more perfectly any being is enabled to *pursue* the track of providence; the more this wonderful scene is *enlarged* and *opened* to his view; the more *clearly* he *perceives* the *absurd consequences* that follow from the *Atheistic scheme*, which attributes the formation and government of the world to *fate* or *chance*;

the more *distinctly* he can *enumerate* the *vast advantages* resulting from the inspection and care of an universal over-ruling mind, and point out the *mischiefs* and *confusions*, that would inevitably spring from a state of *intire anarchy*, with respect to the *moral* world, and the *immense system* of nature: He must, of course, feel himself inspired with more exalted and transporting sentiments of *delight* and *praise*.---A mind thus *enlightened*, a heart *thus affected*, would naturally express its surprise, its joy, and lowly reverent adoration in the language of the text: Alleluiah: *For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

But it is scarce of more importance to us to believe that there *is* a providence, than to enquire how far it may reasonably be supposed to *extend*: I therefore, in my last discourse, laid before you several strong probabilities for the doctrine of a *particular providence*. But there is one topic that, I think, deserves to be distinctly and fully illustrated; and that is the *particular interposition* of the supreme Being, as it may directly and immediately respect *moral agents*: Which tho' it be a point of great weight in the present argument, and of the utmost consequence to virtue and religion, those who have opposed a particular providence have been too apt to *overlook*.---So that they have either not rightly *understood*, or the least we can say is, that they have not fairly *stated* and *examined*, the doctrine, which they would be thought to have disproved. For if the *single* principle, which is intended for the subject of the following discourse, can be established on good probabilities, all their reasonings, so far as they are designed *absolutely* to discard the notion of a *particular providence*, must be weak and inconclusive. Let us then enquire,

In the first place, how far in *general* and in what *particular* instances, God may influence the *minds* of men, in order to serve the wise and gracious purposes of his providential government; and what *reasons* there are

are to induce us to believe, that there is *actually* such an influence: After which it will be proper to shew,

In the second place, that *this alone exclusive* of all immediate influence on necessary causes, and the laws established in the material world, will constitute a *particular providence* of vast extent, and of great effect with relation both to private and public happiness.

The first thing proposed was to enquire, how far in *general*, and in what *particular* instances, God may influence the *minds* of men, in order to serve the wise purposes of his providential government; and what *reasons* there are to induce us to believe, that there is *actually* such an influence.---That the supreme and infinite Being *may* have an immediate and easy access to the human mind, whenever he pleases, is beyond all reasonable contradiction. As he originally formed it, he must be thoroughly acquainted with its *internal frame*; with the *strength* and *extent* of its faculties in *each individual*; with all the *different ways* in which it is capable of being *impressed*; and with what *variety*, and *degree* of *force*, impressions may be excited and fixed in it, consistently with the *natural* and *regular exercise* of its moral powers, and its *design* and *use* in the Creation. And whatever his infinite wisdom knows to be *possible*, whatever it sees in any supposeable circumstance to be *fit* and *expedient*, his boundless and uncontrollable power must enable him to *effect*. There is not therefore the least difficulty in admitting, that the first cause of all things *can* influence the minds of men; but whether he ever *will*, whether he ever *does*, act in this manner, *these* are the only questions. Now I think there are several clear *probabilities*, to one that considers the matter impartially, on the side of *allowing* this influence, which cannot be so much as pretended to by those who *oppose* it: And, of consequence, it must appear much more *credible* on the common principles of *reason*, without the additional light and evidence of *revelation*, than the contrary scheme.

And in the *first* place, that many *wise* purposes may be served by such an *influence*, is in general easy to be con-

conceived, even by our shallow and limited understandings. "For the *mind* being the *spring* of all human actions, whatever *influences* its judgments, counsels, and determinations, must *proportionably* influence the *state* of human affairs; and may, in some instances, direct and regulate the *greatest* and most *important* events." By God's interposing, in particular cases, to moderate, and govern the *views*, *dispositions*, and *passions* of mankind, the *course* of the world may in many respects be vastly *different* from what it would *otherwise* have been: "Great evils may be prevented---extensive and lasting *benefits* procured---a *variety* of *useful ends* may be answered with respect to particular moral agents, and public communities"---ends, which *without* such a direction of providence would in all probability *never* have been attained, or have been served but very *imperfectly*; if not entirely *defeated* by ill-concerted projects, and the prevalence of unruly passions. And this alone must afford a just and fair presumption, that there *actually is* such a divine over-ruling influence as I am now disputing for; unless there be some other principles of *reason* of *superior*, or at least of *equal* weight, to induce us to believe the contrary; which, I hope, it will appear, from the whole of this discourse, that there *are not*, and perhaps *cannot be*.

Nothing can be a more certain and uncontestable truth than this, "that if God governs the *moral* world *at all*, he must do it in the most *perfect* manner; *i. e.* by such methods, as are most worthy his infinite *wisdom* and *goodness*." If therefore we have ground to suppose, that *wise* purposes may be served by directing and influencing the *minds* of men, which in all probability could *not* have been executed, by leaving them entirely to the course of their own *schemes* and *reflections*; and for which it does not appear (considering the *indeterminable variety* of circumstances, that attend *free agents*) how any *certain provision* could be made in the original laws and standing course of *nature*:

ture: We must have equal ground to believe, that this direction and influence is *one branch* of God's *moral* providence; because this belief gives us a more *exalted* and *honourable* idea of the *government* of the all-perfect Being, than the opposite opinion can possibly do; "and every *wise end*, that may, upon the whole, be promoted by such a *particular providence*, must in the necessary nature of things be a *reason*, why it should *actually* take place."

Again, it will, I make no doubt, be easily admitted, that "the government of God is properly suited to the *natures* of those beings who are the subjects of it, and adapted to their peculiar *exigencies*." Otherwise the matter will amount to much the same, as if they were entirely *neglected*, and left without any *government* at all. But it is certain in general, that the affairs of *mankind*, in which there are, and it is highly probable ever will be, infinite *variations* and *inequalities* that cannot be imagined, without destroying their *free agency*, to be absolutely *fixed*; the affairs of *mankind*, I say, cannot, for this reason, be regulated by the *same kind* of established laws as obtain in the *material world*: And consequently with respect to *these*, an *immediate interposition* seems to be extremely natural, if not upon some occasions *necessary* to be supposed. And if we consider farther, that man in innumerable instances is *blind* and *helpless* in himself, ignorant of his true *present* happiness or misery, and of the proper means to secure the one, and avoid the other; that what appears to him most *worthy* to be *chosen* may frequently be attended with deplorable and pernicious *consequences*, and *terminate* in the absolute frustration of his best and most honourable designs; and that the *effects* of his conduct, tho' utterly *unsuspected* by himself, may involve *himself*, his *family*, his *friends*, the *society* to which he belongs, in such calamities, as may not *end* even *here*, but be transmitted down to *late posterity*---Can we imagine, that the *happiness* or *misery* of the world is thus left to be *determined*

mined by *private* follies and indiscretions, or even by a mistake in *public* councils, without any *superior* care and regulation? Is it not more agreeable to our best and most perfect notions of the Deity to suppose, that he sometimes, by a *secret* and *invisible* influence, is the means of preventing that confusion that would be introduced by wild schemes and passions, and inspires wisdom and resolution to bring about great events, that tend to the happiness of mankind?

Add to all this that a very considerable part of the good and evil, that happens in the world, is evidently caused by the determinations and actions of *men*. And as this good and evil is the result of *free agency*, we can have no conception, how it is possible for the proportions of both to be regulated and *rightly balanced*, without introducing, upon some occasions, the exercise of a *special* and *immediate* influence; how it is possible that they should be *balanced* in *such* a manner, not only as the *good* of *societies*, but as even a *proper* state of *moral discipline* may require. And as the *chief end* of the divine administration can justly be imagined to be nothing else, but the *rectitude* and *happiness* of the moral world, this strongly confirms all the other reasonings, that have been before made use of, for a *particular* direction and regulation of their principles, dispositions, and pursuits.

But then it must be allowed, that there are certain *limitations* with which this matter must be understood. *No such* influence should be admitted, as destroys the *moral character* of man; *no such continual* influence in all *common* cases, as is unnecessary, and renders his *rational faculties* useless; not a *mechanical* and *necessitating* influence, but such alone as is *intellectual* and *persuasive*; and, finally, *no such influence* with respect to *evil* actions, as makes the Deity the *efficient cause* and *author* of them, or the *tempter* and *exciter* to vice and immorality, and, consequently, stains and dishonours the essential and spotless *purity* of his nature. With these *restraints* carefully attended to, and kept always

in view, the doctrine of a divine interposition and influence, with respect to the *minds* of men, is agreeable to all the dictates of pure and uncorrupted *reason*. And nothing can be *so suitable* to the character of God, as a Being absolutely perfect, the *Creator, governor, father and friend* of mankind, nothing *so exactly* agrees with his concern for the *happiness* of his creatures, and peculiar *delight and complacency* in *virtue*, as that scheme; which supposes him, by a gentle and gracious communication with the *mind*, to assist *penitent* sinners in reforming their evil habits; to strengthen the resolution of the *good and virtuous*, and render their duty easy and delightful; to supply inward strength for *extraordinary trials*, and inward support and comfort in *special exigencies*; to lay restraints on *intemperate passion*, and divert from *hurtful purposes*. “And all this may be done by suggesting proper thoughts to the mind in a *clear and strong* light, and with only that *degree and force* of impression, which is naturally adapted to counterbalance contrary prejudices, and excite and fix the *attention*.”—A clear view of *advantage*, or of great *inconvenience and misery*, of the *amiableness and honour* of one course, and of the *shame and infamy* of another, of the improbability of *success*, the irreparable mischiefs of a *disappointment*; these things, I say, and such other *general principles* by which the minds of men are *influenced*, will check the *passions*, animate or divert a *present resolution*, inspire *new purposes*, alter our *opinion* of particular methods of action which we were before intent upon; “And consequently this is the *main part*, if not the *whole*, of that *internal influence*, which is necessary to be admitted in the general course of God’s *moral providence*.” From whence it follows, that it may be carried on in a way perfectly agreeable to the *make and constitution* of the human mind, and consistent with the *due and regular exercise* of its *inherent faculties*. “Nay, it is entirely *analogous* to what we know to be the *common course* of things, in the *visible constitution* of

“ of nature ; in which it was *originally intended* and
 “ *provided*, that mankind should mutually offer ar-
 “ *guments*, suggest powerful and determining *motives*,
 “ *inform*, *convince*, and *persuade* each other ; nay, in
 “ which it was *originally provided*, that such occur-
 “ *rences* should frequently happen, as will, notwith-
 “ *standing* our utmost *reluctance* and *aversion* to it,
 “ *engage* our *attention*, and almost *constrain* and *force*
 “ *us to reflect*.” And the *influence* of God upon the
 mind, in the way in which it has been above ex-
 plained, is of the *same kind* ; persuasive, strong, and
 awakening ; and whatever *difference* there may be
 supposed to be in the *propriety* of the methods of con-
 viction, and the *degree* of light and evidence, yet we
 find, by experience, that it is scarce ever to be *dis-*
tinguished from the suggestions and operations of our
own reason, and that we are still left to our own *choice*
 and *determination*, and consequently to the *perfect* ex-
 ercise of our *natural* liberty. So that it does not ap-
 pear to be in the least inconsistent with the established
laws of nature, but may *itself*, for all that we are ca-
 pable of advancing to the contrary, be *one* of its
 established *secret* laws ; and no valid objection can be
 made to it, from any of the *fixed* rules of divine go-
 vernment, nor from any *certain* principles of reason.
 I now proceed, (having said enough on the *first* head,
viz. how far a divine influence on the minds of men
 may be allowed in *general*, and to what *particular*
 cases extended) to shew,

In the *second place*, that *this alone*, *exclusive* of all
immediate influences on *necessary* causes, and the laws
 established in the *material* world, will constitute a *par-*
ticular providence of vast extent, and of great *effect*
 with relation both to private and public happiness.---
 It may not only *affect*, in its *consequences*, many con-
 siderable instances of happiness *here* ; but extend its
 beneficial influence to the *future* world, and remain,
 in the pleasures and advantages resulting from it, to
 all *eternity*.—It may have a great share in *fixing* the

state of our fellow-creatures; the *temper* of whose minds, the forming of their *manners*, their *success*, *prosperity*, and *honour*, may very much depend on our *resolutions* and *course of action*: For the happiness of men is not wholly determined by *their own* dispositions and behaviour; but springs in a great measure from their *situation*, and from the qualities and pursuits of *those* to whom they are most strictly united, and with whom they are called to *converse*. And an influence that is at first entirely *personal*, and where the subject of it, too, is of an *obscure* character, may not only expand and dilate itself to *great multitudes*; but settle, at last, after several *intermediate* events impossible to be traced, in *flagrant* and *grand* events, that are of the highest concern and importance to *whole societies*.---Add to all this, that impressions made on *several* different minds, at *one* juncture, may produce *effects* neither *intended* nor *foreseen* by either of the immediate agents; but, at the same time, effects that are *critical*, and, in the utmost degree, *momentous* and *useful*. And all may be owing to their being introduced at *proper seasons*, and *uniting* their influence; and if the interposition had failed but in *one* of these instances, the *whole design* might have been rendered abortive. A proper and seasonable address to the minds of *princes*, especially, and such as have the *conduct* of *public affairs*, may decide the *fate* of nations, and establish *liberty* or *slavery*. Such an influence, and at a certain *period* too, may promote a secure and lasting *tranquility*; and the *want* of it introduce the desolations and horrors of *war*: which may be succeeded by a *gradual declension*, and at length by the *utter destruction* of the most *flourishing* states and empires.---And all these things put together, (which may be occasioned by the communication of God with the *mind* of man, *exclusive* of all influence on the mere *material world*) must constitute a particular providence of very *wide* and *diffusive* concern; since (as was at first proposed to be shewn) it may reach to the *princi-*
pal

pal affairs of the present life, as well as extend itself to an eternal duration.

To conclude: The doctrine of the text, as it has been particularly and largely illustrated in this and the foregoing discourse, is an undeniable reason for the most solemn and constant *reverence* of the Supreme Being, on whom we absolutely depend. It teaches us, likewise, that our only *security* lies in his protection, and in being the objects of his gracious regard: for, otherwise, by innumerable *casualties*, against which we cannot *defend* ourselves, he can frustrate all our *schemes*, and blast all our *pleasures*. We learn, that *the preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is of the Lord*; that even *the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord*, and as *the rivers of water he turneth it, which way soever he pleaseth*; that *the Lord increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them, he enlargeth the nations, and straitneth them again*; that *he doth according to his will in heaven, and in the earth, in the seas, and in all deep places; in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways*.---So that in all circumstances, whether prosperous or adverse, we should acknowledge the *wise appointment* of the great *invisible* disposer of events; and, consequently, be thankful to him for every instance of prosperity, and patient and humble under afflictive visitations. If we thus discharge the proper duties of every state and condition of life, and are diligently employed in the practice of universal virtue, we may not only *rejoice* in the *general notion* of God's over-ruling providence, but in the comfortable prospect of its *special direction and favour*; and may each of us say, in the sublime and triumphant language of the prophet *Habakkuk*---
Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, [i. e. tho' there be the utmost distress, confusion, and desolation in nature.] yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

DISCOURSE XVI.

The true Ground of the Argument, from
Reason, for a future State.

[F O S T E R .]

ECCLES. ix. 2.

All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: As is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

THIS observation of Solomon is the ground of one of the strongest arguments, that the light of nature suggests, for a future state; in which there will be a more remarkable distinction made betwixt good and bad men, than the settled constitution of things, and the general laws of nature, which take place in the present scene of our existence, will possibly admit of; and a more adequate and impartial distribution of rewards and punishments. The force of this argument has been almost universally admitted, as having its foundation in sense and experience: and it must be allowed, I think, to carry with it the utmost shew of probability, as long as it is supposed—that there is in nature an eternal difference

ference between virtue and vice; that mankind are subject to a *moral government*; and that the supreme being, to whom they are accountable, is unchangeably *wise, righteous, and good*.

But we are too apt to destroy, in a great measure, the weight of our own arguments, by pushing matters to an *extreme*. We attend only to the single point which we have immediately in our view, without considering-----that truth is a *connected* and *uniform* scheme, and, in all the parts of it, perfectly correspondent and harmonious-----that arguments which *contradict*, must of necessity *destroy*, each other-----And that we cannot take a more sure and effectual method to demolish that very fabrick, which we are most fond of raising, than by building on *inconsistent* principles. And, if I mistake not, something of this inconsistency too plainly appears in the reasonings of mankind, concerning the *natural* rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice, in *this life*, when these reasonings are applied to different purposes: By which means, just as much as they gain in *one* argument, they lose in *another*, perhaps, equally important; and either *the cause of virtue itself* is injudiciously exposed, or, else, the *natural evidences of a future state of retribution* are obscured and diminished.

Thus we find, that if the point to be proved be the *immutable distinction* between moral good and evil; if the professed design be to evince and display the essential and intrinsic *excellency* of the former, and *maliginity* of the latter; then the reasoner is apt to expatiate, without a sufficient guard, on the *present rewards* of moral rectitude, and *punishments* of sin and impiety, as if both the one and the other were, in most instances at least, *real, constant, unavoidable*. “A proper distinction is not made between the *tendency* of virtue, and the *actual consequences* of virtue.” These are confusedly mixed and blended together, as if they were precisely the same idea. Virtue is incautiously represented as if it was, *in fact*, its own reward;

ward; and vice as if it was, *in fact*, its own punishment. And by thus exaggerating the pleasures of the one, and the miseries attending the other, beyond *truth*, and, in a variety of causes, against *experience*; by describing what only would be the *natural result* of both, if many unavoidable accidents did not intervene, as their *certain* and *necessary effects*; and by supposing, moreover, that the Providence of God *frequently*, and even in *common* cases, interposes in an invisible but extraordinary manner, to protect, support, and favour the upright, and, on the contrary, to bring calamities and disgraces upon the workers of iniquity: by such mistakes, I say, and confus'd representations as these, the *true condition* of human life is considerably disguised; it has *few marks* left of its being an initiatory scene, a state of probation and discipline, and *much more of the appearance* of a state of recompence, and compleat scheme of moral government.

“For the more *clearly* we can *trace* rewards and punishments *actually* annexed to virtue and vice *here*, it will probably be imagined, that there is, in *proportion*, the less ground to expect the *distribution* of them *hereafter*.” Or if this should be thought, by the more considerate part of mankind, not to conclude *absolutely* (as indeed in reason it could not) against a future state of more *equal* and *full* retribution, the proofs of this important doctrine would, however, be more *perplexed* and *intricate*; *scepticks* and *infidels* might take occasion, from hence, to grow more licentious and insolent; and *weak* minds would be the more easily bewildered, and lost in a maze of uncertainty.

But there is *another* error, the *opposite* extreme to what I have now been speaking of, which is much more common; “and that is aggravating the *miseries* of good men, and describing the circumstances of “virtue and piety as quite *disconsolate* and *forlorn* in “this life, in order to shew, in a stronger light, the “necessity there is of supposing it *introductory* to ano-

“ther.”

"ther." And this, tho' a gross mistake, and, as I shall hereafter demonstrate, of vastly injurious consequence, is founded, among other false grounds, on some *perverted* passages of scripture; and particularly on the assertion of *Solomon* in the text, that *all things come alike to all*; and that there is *one event to the righteous, and to the wicked*. *Solomon's* premises, from whence this conclusion is drawn, are undeniably *right*; but the inference itself has no manner of *relation* to them, and is intirely *wild* and *unnatural*. For this great and wise writer was only discoursing of those *external* events that happen, according to establish'd and hitherto unvaried laws, in the ordinary course of nature and providence. He intended nothing more, than that the sovereign ruler of the world did not, in general, think it fit to interpose *miraculously*, in order to prevent that *promiscuous* distribution of good and evil, which, in various cases, must spring inevitably from the original constitution and frame of the universe. And as to what are the *natural* and *probable* consequences of virtue and vice, together with the *influence* which they severally have on the happiness or misery of the Human race, these are points to which he could have *no view* at all, because they are absolutely remote from the design and scope of his whole argument: Which was only to prove, that there is no way of *knowing*, certainly, *good or evil by any thing that is before us*; because such is the disposition of things, in this *probationary* state, that the same *events* happen *indiscriminately*, from fixed and necessary laws of nature; and may be brought about by *different*, nay by quite *opposite* causes; and the very same *natural* good and evil, which are oftentimes occasioned by *moral* good and evil, must frequently also, with respect to us, be *accidental* and entirely *unavoidable*.

How fond soever therefore men may be, to support a favorite scheme, of engaging *Solomon* on their side, they can never, with the least colour of plausibility, strain the words of the text so far, as to make them

speak this sense---“ that the *pleasures* of virtue and
 “ vice are *equal*; and that, if we exclude the consi-
 “ deration of *futurity*, the *pious* man has no advan-
 “ tage above the *profane*, nor the *benevolent* man
 “ above the *malicious* and *cruel*, nor he who carefully
 “ governs his temper, and enjoys the blessing of *cool*
 “ and *regular* passions, above the dissolute and uncon-
 “ trouled *libertine*.”---This, indeed, itself is going
 a prodigious length: it is, to the common reason of
 mankind, an unaccountable strain of extravagance;
 because it asserts that to be the *plan* and *design* of pro-
 vidence, and the present *real* state of Human nature,
 which not only contradicts universal experience, but
 is in itself absolutely impossible. For as virtue and
 vice are, and must be, an eternal *opposition* to each
 other; and consequently as the pleasures, which im-
 mediately flow from such inconsistent and *repugnant*
 principles, must of necessity be not only of a distinct,
 but of a *contrary*, kind: from hence it certainly fol-
 lows, that if the one deserve to be *pursued*, the other
 ought for the same reason to be *shunned* and *neglected*;
 if the one be *noble* and *excellent*, the other must be
base and *despicable*. “ The same kind of *external*
 “ advantages may indeed, in some instances, happen
 “ to be procured both by a strictly *moral*, and by an
 “ *irregular* and *unfair*, practice; but to imagine that
 “ there can, upon the whole, be an *exact equality* be-
 “ tween the pleasures and benefits arising from both
 “ of these, is to suppose this most flagrant absurdity,
 “ that the *effects* may, in every circumstance and every
 “ degree, be the same, where the *causes* are not only
 “ quite different, but have a direct and irreconcilable
 “ contrariety in their very nature.” So that if we
 attempt to establish a fundamental article of religion
 on such visionary and romantick fancies, on principles
 like this, which *confutes* and *destroys* itself, we save the
infidel the trouble, of undermining religion by his
 own art and sophistry, by doing the work to his
 hands;

hands; because, as we build without a *foundation*, the *superstructure* must sink and fall of course.

“Others, therefore, being sensible perhaps of this error, and yet fearing that the yielding the argument, in point of *natural happiness* to the cause of virtue, will invalidate their reasonings for a future state of retribution, have avoided the *inconsistency*, but by increasing the *absurdity*”—By asserting, that if the *term* of man's existence is confined to the *present* life, the virtuous are *in general*, and excepting only a *few singular and eminent cases*, of all persons the most *unhappy*.——“A strange position; that, one would think, none who had ever known what it was to *gratify* an irregular appetite on the one hand, or who had *tasted* the refined and substantial pleasures of virtue on the other, could be capable of advancing and defending;” and which a *general* consideration of the subject, without entering minutely into the discussion of particulars, will be fully sufficient to expose.

For if it be true, that *moral* and *religious* men, considered without the hope and expectation of *futurity*, are more miserable than the *immoral* and *impious*, and that not only merely in some *extraordinary* cases, but in the *common* and *regular* course of human life; if this, I say, be true, (which every one, for the *honour* of his nature, must at least *wish* to be false) it can only be on such principles, as will render those, who are devoted to the pursuit of virtue, more miserable than even the *brutes* themselves: I say than the brutes themselves, because no other principles can possibly justify so strange an assertion, but those which follow—“That *sensual excesses*, if there be no life hereafter, yield a more *solid* and *manly* happiness, than submitting to the restraints of *reason* and *religion*; that a secret and successful *fraud* is the source of *truer* pleasure than a strict adherence to the rules of *equity* and *honour*; and a mean degenerate *selfishness* than *generosity* and universal *benevolence*.——And if this again

“ again be true, it undeniably follows, that the pleasures of *sense*, upon the supposition that there is no other life, must be preferable to *intellectual* and *moral* enjoyments; those of the *inferior*, and *less noble*, to those of the more *excellent* and *sublime* part in our composition.——And if so, *sensitive* gratifications must be *always* preferable to those of a *moral* nature. For if a life of *reason* and *virtue*, to *eternity*, be more eligible than a life of *sense*, it must be so, in itself, in every *part* and *period* of our duration; and, on the contrary, if a *sensitive* happiness be, in itself, or excepting a few rare and extraordinary instances, more valuable than a *rational* and *moral* happiness in any part of duration, it must, of necessity, be so in every part of duration, i. e. to all eternity: And the *man* ought for ever to be degraded, that the *brute* may be exalted.”

Besides, this *injurious* representation of human life not only involves in it all these absurdities, considered as a *speculative* error, but is attended with most pernicious consequences: Of which, as a sufficient specimen to shock a serious and considerate mind, I need only mention these three.——That it weakens the principal argument, by which we can pretend to prove, solidly, the *difference* of moral good and evil; which argument is, “the natural tendency of the *former*, at all times, to happiness, and of the *latter* to misery.”——That it gives an *unbounded scope* to immorality and vice, where men are so unhappy as not to believe another state of existence hereafter——And, finally, that it lessens even the argument for a future state, which it is intended to illustrate and display in a stronger light; and, for the sake of which, it so degrades and vilifies the *present* circumstances of human nature, and describes virtue itself as little better than a capricious and arbitrary constitution, and an empty name.

“For it is, principally, from what we know of the nature of things in *this* life, that we can draw just conclusions with reference to their *design* upon the whole. Because virtue, in what we see of it here,

“ appears

"appears to have a *tendency to happiness*, we fairly presume that it was *originally* designed for happiness." And as this design fails of being *executed*, very remarkably in *some* instances, and to a considerable degree in *all*, by many unavoidable events, against which we are unable to *guard* in the situation wherein we are now placed; we are led to expect, upon the best grounds of probability, that it will be *completed* hereafter. "But if we had no proof, from our experience and observation on facts, that virtue was appointed to be the *source* of human happiness, or, which amounts to much the same, that the *ideas* of virtue and happiness, have in *nature*, a *connexion* with each other; we should have much less reason to hope, than we have at present, that the maker of the world *intended* it for happiness in any scene of our existence. And if it was from itself, and from the original laws of the whole constitution, more *miserable* than vice *here*; I can see no clear medium by which to demonstrate, that it would not be *miserable for ever*."

Thus have I shewn how the account of the reward of virtue in this life has been *aggravated*, in order to demonstrate its intrinsic excellence, and how far it has been *diminished*, together with the present punishment of vice, to heighten the natural evidences of a future retribution. And now there only remain two things more, that are necessary to be insisted on, to finish what I intend upon this subject, and remove all the material difficulties relating to it. The *first* is, to enquire what is the *true state* of the case, in opposition to both the extremes above-mentioned; and then to shew, *secondly*, that as this affords, on the one hand, convincing evidence of the *essential difference* of moral good and evil, by means of the *sanctions* annexed to them *at present*; it also leaves the strongest and most cogent probabilities of a *future* more exact and impartial recompence.

The true state of the argument, with respect to the *natural* rewards and punishments of virtue and vice, in

in *this* life, will, I believe, be comprehended under the following heads.—*First*, that virtue, in general, tends to the *happiness*, and vice to the *misery*, of mankind. *Secondly*, that the happiness arising from virtue is of a *nobler* kind, and more *durable* in its nature, than any that can spring from ungoverned excesses. If self-complacency, and self-applause, be principal *ingredients* in the happiness of every intelligent and reflecting being, *virtue* must tend to happiness; and if self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, inward disorder, remorse, and shame, are the *necessary springs* of infelicity to the human mind, vice must tend to *misery*. And the happiness of the former must, in itself, be as much more excellent than that of the latter, as *reason* is superior to *sense*, and *animal instinct*. From whence it plainly follows, in the *third* place, that so far as the *natural* consequences of virtue and vice are permitted *actually* to take place, the *ballance of happiness* will undeniably lie on the side of virtue——So far, I mean, as it results *properly* and *solely* from these two different methods of conduct, and is *abstracted* from all extraneous and foreign considerations. To this, therefore, I may add, by way of corollary, “that if we suppose “the *outward advantages* of health, fortune, and the “like, to be exactly *equal*, the pleasures of the good “man, even here, may justly upon the whole claim “the *prebeminence*.” Besides all this, virtue is undeniably necessary to the good of mankind in general considered as a *community*, a *system* of creatures linked together by social affections and one universal interest; and, consequently, it must tend to advance the happiness of *every individual* in his *social* character; which is a very considerable, and indeed the chief, part of the *present* happiness of man. So that, in the *fifth* and *last* place, we may fairly lay down this as the sum and result of the whole, that if there were no future life it would still, in the common and regular course of things, be the *interest* of *all* mankind to be *virtuous*. And even in *extreme* exigencies, the case is not so much altered as may be generally imagined. For
if

if a man secures his estate, or preserves his life, by *sinful* and *cowardly* compliances, the *shame* of having acted with so much *meanness* and *dishonour* may, to an ingenuous mind be more intolerable than *tortures* or *death*. "There may be such bitter and stinging remorse, where there is no fear of *punishment*, arising from a reflection on the *baseness* of actions in themselves, as may render *even an infidel* substantially and "excessively miserable." And in this case I will venture to pronounce, that it would have been his *happiness* to be inflexibly honest, tho' *reproach*, *poverty*, and even *the loss of life*, were the certain and unavoidable consequence.

And as the short and general account, which has now been given, proves, beyond all reasonable exception, that there is an eternal and immutable *fitness* in virtue, and *malignity* in vice; so, which is the next thing to be considered, it leaves the strongest probability, that can fairly be desired, of this great and important truth, that notwithstanding the rewards and punishment of moral good and evil that are interwoven, as it were, with the universal constitution of nature, there yet remains a future state of more adequate and *unexceptionable* retribution.

For, in the *first* place, the evils and miseries to which *all* good men are exposed, from the common frailty of human nature and general imperfection of the world, are sufficiently *numerous* to prevent their being *completely* happy; notwithstanding it be allowed, that the pleasures resulting from *integrity* are vastly superior to those false and polluted joys, which are derived from *vice* and *sensuality*.

Secondly, As virtue in this life can never of itself constitute *perfect* happiness, so there are cases supposable of intense pain and suffering, in which it can hardly be imagined to render existence here below, upon the whole, *eligible*; or, if barely eligible, no mark of the divine *delight* and *complacency* in virtue; nor what would be thought, by any one, a *suitable* reward

reward of it. Should it be here said, that, in the most melancholy and deplorable circumstances that can be imagined, virtue will always make a man *more happy*, or rather *less miserable*, than its contrary: I answer, that this alone is not sufficient; "but it must render him more happy, if no other recompence be intended, than vice is or ever will be in any possible circumstances." For if vice be, at any time, more happy than virtue, the conclusion, upon comparing the two cases together, whatever they are, can be no other than this, "that virtue is punished, and vice rewarded."

Add to this, *thirdly*, that the natural good and evil consequences of virtue and vice are frequently *obstructed*, or *evaded*, in all which instances there is, properly speaking, no reward or punishment at all; and that they are neither so *remarkable* in themselves, nor so *universal*, nor so *certain* in the present life, as may reasonably be expected will support a firm and steady integrity under discouragements and oppressions, or counter-balance the strong allurements of worldly honour and pleasure: And further, that there is a great variety of cases, in which the calamities of good men are *notorious*, but the reward of their virtue is not *seen*; and in which the outward advantages, which wicked men enjoy, are *conspicuous* and exceedingly *remarkable*, while the punishment of their vices is entirely *concealed* and *hid* from public observation.----- And, in every case of this kind, the man of virtue will be so far from being distinguished by his *superior happiness*, that he will rather appear to be the *miserable* man. And consequently one great end of rewards and punishments, if there be no future life, is entirely frustrated, which is this; to make such a distinction between *all* instances of virtue and vice, as shall enforce the former, and discourage and restrain the latter; as shall excite to the one, and deter from the other, in every *kind* and in every *degree*.

In

In the *last* place, notwithstanding the provision of *lesser* rewards and punishments in this life, yet if they are not *continued*, and dispensed more *regularly* and *equitably* in a future state, “the *most virtuous* of mankind will *often* be the *least* rewarded, and the *most vicious* the *least* punished.” I rank those among the *most virtuous*, who have taken most pains, and suffered the greatest inconveniencies, for the advancement of religion, and the good of their fellow-creatures; those who bravely *suffer* and *die* in defence of virtue and liberty; and those among the *most vicious*, who have so effectually stupified their natural conscience of good and evil, as to be abandoned of all shame and remorse. The *last* of these, it is plain, avoid the worst and most dreadful punishment of their vices *here*, by being hardened and insensible; and are much *less* miserable, if there be no futurity, than sinners of the very *lowest* degree of guilt, who are subject to the anxious horrors of an alarmed and troubled conscience. And, on the other hand, the generous *sufferer* for truth, and for the welfare of mankind, is *less* rewarded, upon the whole, than another of *common* and far *inferior* virtue, who has not been exposed to such rigorous and severe trials.---And is not this a *demonstration*, that there must be another life to rectify such prodigious *inequalities* as these? Does not this *certainly* follow from admitting the existence and perfections of God, and his righteous government of the moral world? Is there any *medium* between the *denial* of this principle and downright *atheism*? I think indeed there *cannot* be: And, moreover, that if it be *fit* to reward virtue, and punish vice, in *any* particular, it must be *fit* to do it, proportionably, in *every* particular; and that therefore the reasoning here made use of plainly and strongly enforces a future state not only of *strict* and *impartial* retribution so far as it goes, but of *universal* retribution. This seems to be most consistent with the ideas

of supreme wisdom and goodness, and with the common principles of equity.

To conclude ; the notion of a Deity, without a Providence, is utterly *insufficient* as to all purposes of religion and morality ; a Providence, with respect to mankind, is nothing, without government ; nor government without laws ; nor laws without universal, certain, and visible *sanctions*, adapted to the entire case, i. e. to the *capacities, situations, difficulties*, and *weaknesses* of the subjects, their *reluctance* to obedience, their *inward*, whether natural or acquired, *bias*es, and their *external* temptations to deviate from the rule of government : Nothing of which is here *adequately* provided for. The present is, upon the whole, a promiscuous scene of *irregular* and *confused* appearance ; with very *indistinct* and *imperfect* traces of *distributive justice* : It can, therefore, be reasonably considered in no other light, than as the *beginning* of the *first step* towards a more perfect rational existence, the *introduction* and *path* to immortality.----Otherwise, how little, by his vastly *precarious* tenure of life, is man advanced above the *flowers* of a day, and the *insects* and *animals* of a few months or years growth, and alternate *vicissitudes* of pleasure and pain ! What a *trifle* is his dignity of nature ! How *diminutive* his importance and rank in the creation ?

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DISCOURSE XVII.

The Evidences of Christianity briefly stated; and the New Testament proved to be genuine.

[DODDRIDGE.]

2 PET. i. 16.

---We have not followed cunningly devised fables.---

IT is undoubtedly a glory to our age and country, that the nature of moral virtue has been so clearly stated, and the practice of it so strongly enforced, by the views of its native beauty, and beneficial consequences, both to private persons, and societies. Perhaps in this respect, hardly any nation or time has equally, certainly few, if any, have exceeded our own. Yet I fear I might add, there have been few ages or countries, where vice has more generally triumphed, in its most audacious, and, in other respects, most odious forms.

This may well appear a surprising case; and it will surely be worth our while to enquire into the causes of so strange a circumstance. I cannot now enter into a particular detail of them. But I am persuaded, none is more considerable than that unhappy *disregard*, either to the *gospel* in general, or to its most

peculiar and essential truths, which is so visible amongst us, and which appears to be continually growing. It is plain, that like some of old, who thought and *professed themselves the wisest* of mankind, or in other words, the *freest thinkers* of their age, multitudes among us *have not liked to retain God and his truths in their knowledge*: And it is therefore the less to be wondered at, if *God has given them up to a reprobate mind (a)*; to the most infamous lusts, and enormities; and to a depth of a degeneracy, which, while it is in part the natural consequence, is in part also the just, but dreadful punishment of their apostacy from the faith. And I am persuaded, that those who do indeed wish well to the cause of public virtue, as every true Christian most certainly does, cannot serve it more effectually, than by endeavouring to establish men in the belief of the *gospel* in general, and to affect their hearts with its most distinguishing truths.

The latter of these is our frequent employment; the former I shall now, by the divine assistance, apply myself to; and I have chosen the words before us, as a proper introduction to such a design.

They do indeed peculiarly refer to *the coming of our Lord*, which the apostle represents as attested by that glory, of which he was an eye-witness on the mount of transfiguration, and by that voice from heaven which he heard there: But the truth of these facts is evidently connected with that of the *gospel* in general. I am persuaded therefore, you will think they are properly prefixed to a discourse on the general evidences of Christianity. And I hope, by the divine assistance, to propose them at this time in such a manner, as shall convince you, that the apostles had reason to say, and that we also have reason to repeat it, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables (b)*.

I have often touched on this subject occasionally; but I think it my duty at present to insist something more largely upon it. You easily apprehend, that it

(a) Rom. i. 28.

(b) 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18.

is a matter of the highest importance, being indeed no other than *the great foundation* of all our eternal hopes. While so many are daily attempting to *destroy this foundation*, it is possible, that those of you especially, who are but entering on the world, may be called out to *give a reason of the hope that is in you* (c). I would therefore, with the *apostle*, be concerned, that you may be ready to do it. It may fortify you against the artifices, by which the unwary are often deceived and ensnared, and may possibly enable you to *put to silence their foolishness* (d). At least it will be for the satisfaction of your own minds, to have considered the matter seriously, and to be conscious to yourselves, that you are not *Christians* merely by education, or example, (as had you been born elsewhere) you might have been *Pagans or Mahometans*; but that you are so upon *rational evidence*, and because (as the sacred historian expresses it,) you *know the certainty of those things in which you have been instructed*. (e).

To open and vindicate *the proof of Christianity* in all its extent, would be the employment of many discourses; nor would it, on the whole, be proper to attempt it here. All that I now intend here is, to give you a summary view of the most considerable arguments, in that which seems to me their most proper and natural connection; that so you may be able to judge of them better, than you could possibly do by a few scattered remarks, or by the most copious enlargement on any single branch of them alone. I shall endeavour to dispose these hints so, as that they may be some guide to those, whose leisure and abilities may lead them to a more ample and curious enquiry; that they may not be intangled in so complex an argument, but may proceed in an orderly manner. And if any of you, my friends, desire a more particular information on any of those heads, which I now but briefly suggest, you may depend upon it, that faithful *ministers* of every denomination will think

(c) 1 Pet. iii. 15.

(d) 1 Pet. ii. 15.

(e) Luke i. 4.

it an important part of their duty, to give you all the private assistance they can. It is my hearty prayer, that God would enable me to plead his cause with success; that he would open your understandings to receive these things, and strengthen your memories to retain them; that you may not be *like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive* (f); but may be *strong in faith, giving glory to God* (g); that, your *faith* being more and more established, it may appear, that the tree is watered at the roots; and all your other graces may grow and flourish, in an equal proportion.

But before I proceed, I must desire you to observe, that there is no *proof* in the world so satisfactory to the true Christian, as to have felt the transforming *power* of the *gospel* on his own soul. As that illiterate *man whose eyes were miraculously opened by Christ*, when he was questioned by the *Jewish Sanhedrim*, who endeavoured with all their *Sophistry* to prove *Christ* an impostor, *answered* with great steadiness and constancy, and with a great deal of reason too, *This one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see* (h): So the most unlearned of the disciples of *Jesus*, having found his soul enlightened and sanctified, and felt his heart so effectually wrought upon, as to bring him home to his duty, his *God*, and his happiness, by the constraining power of the *gospel*, will despise a thousand subtle objections which may be urged against it: And though *the cross of Christ be to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*, yet with this experience of its saving energy, he will honour it in the midst of all their contempt and ridicule, as *the power of God, and the wisdom of God* (i). In this sense, though the miraculous communication of the *spirit* be ceased, *be that believes, hath still the witness*

(f) Eph. iv. 14.

(g) Rom. iv. 20.

(h) John ix. 25.

(i) 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

in himself (*k*) ; and while the spirit beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God (*l*), he cannot doubt, but that the word, by which he was, as it were, begotten unto him, is indeed a divine and incorruptible seed (*m*). And perhaps, there are certain seasons of pressing temptation, in which the most learned, as well as the most illiterate Christian, will find this the surest anchor of his hope.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, that this glorious kind of evidence, is like the white stone, mentioned in the Revelation, in which there was a new name written, which no man knew, but he who received it (*n*). God has therefore made other provision for the honour and support of his gospel, by furnishing it with a variety of proof, which may with undiminished, and indeed with growing conviction, be communicated from one to another. And we should be greatly wanting in gratitude to him, in zeal for a redeemer's kingdom, and in charitable concern for the conversion of those who reject the gospel, as well as for the edification of those who embrace it, should we wholly overlook these arguments, or neglect to acquaint ourselves with them. This is the evidence, which I am now to propose ; and I desire you would hear it with a becoming attention. I speak to you, as to rational creatures ; judge ye of the reasonableness of what I shall say.

In prosecution of this great design, I shall endeavour more particularly to shew you,---that if we take the matter on a general survey, it will appear highly probable, that such a scheme of doctrines and precepts, as we find Christianity to be, should indeed have been a divine revelation ;--and then, that if we examine into the external evidence of it, we shall find it certain in fact, that it was so, and that it had its original from above.

(*k*) 1 John v. 10.
1 Pet. i. 23.

(*l*) Rom. viii. 16.
(*n*) Rev. ii. 17.

(*m*) Jam. i. 18.

First, let me shew, "that taking the matter merely
 "in theory, it will appear *highly probable*, that such a
 "system as the *gospel* should be indeed a *divine reve-*
 "lation."

To evince this, I would more particularly prove,---
 that the state of mankind was such, as greatly to need
 a revelation;---that there seems, from the light of na-
 ture, *encouragement to hope* that God should grant one;
 ---that it is reasonable to believe, if any were made,
 it should be so *introduced and transmitted*, as we are
 told *Christianity* was; and that its general *nature and*
substance should be such, as we find that of the *gospel* is.
 If these particulars are made out, here will be a strong
presumptive evidence, that *the gospel is from God*; and
 we shall have opened a fair way toward that *more di-*
rect proof, which I principally intend.

I. "The case of mankind is naturally such, as
 "greatly to need a divine revelation."

I speak not here of *man* in his *original state*; though
 even then, as many have largely shewn, some in-
 struction from above seemed necessary to inform him
 of many particulars, which it was highly expedient
 that he should immediately know: But I speak of
 him in the *degenerate condition* in which he now so
 evidently lies, by whatever means he was brought
 into it. It is an easy thing to make florid enco-
 miums on the perfection of *natural light*, and to de-
 ceive unwary readers with an ambiguous term*,
 (which shall sometimes signify all that appears even
 to the divine understanding, and sometimes no more
 than the meanest of the human race may, or than

* This Dr. Tyndal has done in so gross and palpable a manner,
 that it is surprising that fallacy alone should not have exposed his
Christianity as old as the creation, to the immediate contempt of every
 intelligent reader.

they actually do attain;) but let *fact* speak, and the controversy will soon be determined. I appeal to all, that are acquainted with the records of *antiquity*, or that have any knowledge of the most credible accounts of the *present state* of those countries where *Christianity* is unknown, whether it is not too obvious a truth, that *the whole* Heathen world has lain, and still lies in *wickedness* (o). Have not incomparably the greater part of them been perpetually bewildered in their religious notions and practices, vastly differing from each other, and almost equally differing on all sides from the probable appearances of truth and reason? Is any thing so wild as not to have been *believed*, any thing so infamous as not to have been *practised* by them, while they have not only pretended to justify it by reason, but have consecrated it as a part of their religion? To this very day, what are the discoveries of new nations in the *American* or *African* world, but generally speaking, the opening of new scenes of enormity? Rapine, lust, cruelty, human sacrifices, and the most stupid idolatries, are, and for ought I can find, always have been, *the morality and religion* of almost all the *Pagan* nations under heaven: And to say, that there have still been some smothered sparks of reason within, which, if cherished, might have led them to truth and happiness, is only saying, that they have been so much the more criminal, and therefore so much the more miserable.

But you live at home, and hear these things only by uncertain report. Look then around you within the sphere of your own observation, and see the temper and character of the generality of those, who have been educated in a *Christian*, and even in a *protestant* country. Observe their ignorance and forgetfulness of the divine Being, their impieties, their debaucheries, their fraud, their oppression, their pride, their avarice, their ambition, their unnatural insensibility of the wants and sorrows and interests of each

(o) 1 John v. 19.

other;

other; and when you see how bad they generally are in the midst of so many advantages, judge by that of the *probable state* of those that want them. Judge upon these views, whether a *revelation* be an *unnecessary* thing.

2. "There is, from the light of nature, considerable *encouragement to hope*, that God would favour his creatures with *so needful a blessing* as a *revelation* appears."

That a *revelation* is in itself a *possible* thing, is evident beyond all shadow of a doubt. Shall not *he that made man's mouth* (p), who has given us this wonderful faculty of discovering our sentiments, and communicating our ideas to each other, shall not *be able* to converse with his rational creatures, and by sensible manifestations, or by inward impressions, to convey the knowledge of things, which lie beyond the ken of their natural faculties, and yet may be highly conducive to their advantage? To own a *God*, and to deny him such a *power*, would be a notorious contradiction.—But it may appear much more dubious, whether he will please to confer such a favour on sinful creatures.

Now I acknowledge, that we could not *certainly* conclude he would ever do it; considering on the one hand, how justly they stood exposed to his final displeasure; and on the other, what provision he had made by the frame of the human mind, and of nature around us, for giving us such notices of himself, as would leave us *inexcusable*, if we either failed to *know him*, or to *glorify him as God*; as the apostle argues at large (q). Nevertheless methinks, we should have had something of this kind *to hope*, from considering *God* as the indulgent father of his creatures; from observing the tender care which he takes of us, and the liberal supply which he grants for the support

(p) Exod. iv. 11.

(q) Rom. i. 20, & seq.

of the animal life; especially, from the provision which he has made for man, considered as a guilty and calamitous creature, by the medicinal and healing virtues which he has given to many of the productions of nature, which in a state of perfect rectitude and happiness man would never have needed. This is a circumstance, which seemed strongly to intimate, that he would some time or another graciously provide some remedy to heal men's minds; and that he would interpose to instruct them, in his own nature, in the manner in which he is to be served, and in the final treatment which they may expect from him. And I think, such an apprehension seems very congruous to the sentiments of the generality of mankind; as appears from the many *pretences to divine revelation* which have often been made, and the readiness of multitudes to receive them on very slender proofs: This shews how naturally men *expect* some such kind interposition of the deity: A thought, which might farther be confirmed by some remarkable passages of *Heathen writers*, which I have not now time particularly to mention.

3. We may easily conclude, "that if a revelation were given, it would be introduced and transmitted in such a manner, as *Christianity* is said to have been."

It is exceeding *probable*, for instance, that it should be taught, either by some illustrious person sent down from a superior world, or at least by a man of eminent wisdom and piety, who should himself have been, not only a *teacher*, but an *example*, of universal goodness. In order to this it seems *probable*, that he should be led through a series of calamity and distress; since otherwise he would not have been a *pattern* of the virtues, which adorn adversity, and are peculiar to it. And it might also have been *expected*, that in the extremity of his distress, the blessed God, whose messenger

messenger he was, should, in some extraordinary manner, have interposed, either to preserve, or to recover him from death.

It is moreover exceeding *probable*, that such a person, and perhaps also they who were at first employed as his messengers to the world, should be endowed with a power of *working miracles*; both to awaken men's attention, and to prove a divine mission, and the consequent truth of their doctrines; some of which might perhaps not be capable of any other kind of proof; or if they were, it is certain that no method of arguing is so short, so plain, and so forcible, and on the whole, so well suited to the conviction, and probably the reformation of mankind, as a course of evident, repeated, and uncontroled *miracles*. And such a method of proof is especially adapted to the *populace*, who are incomparably the greater part of mankind, and for whose benefit, we may assure ourselves, a revelation would chiefly be designed.— I might add, it was *no way improbable*, though not in itself *certain*, that a dispensation should open *gradually* on the world; and that the most illustrious messenger of God to men should be ushered in by some *predictions*, which should raise a great expectation of his appearance, and have an evident accomplishment in him.

As for the *propagation* of a religion *so introduced*, it seems *no way improbable*, that having been thus established in its first age, it should be *transmitted* to future generations *by credible testimony*, as other important facts are. It is certain, that affairs of the utmost moment, which are transacted amongst men, depend on *testimony*: On this voyages are undertaken, settlements made, and controversies decided; controversies, on which not only the estates, but the lives of men depend. And though it must be owned, that such an *historical evidence* is not equally convincing with *miracles* which are wrought before our own eyes; yet it is certain, it may rise to such a degree as to exclude all

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all reasonable doubt. And I know not why we should expect, that the *evidence of a revelation* should be such, as universally to compel the immediate assistance of all to whom it is offered. To me it seems much more likely, that it should be so adjusted, as to be a kind of *touchstone* to the tempers and characters of men; capable indeed of giving ample satisfaction to the diligent and candid enquirer, yet attended with some circumstances, from whence the captious and perverse might take occasion to cavil and object. *Such* might we suppose the *evidence of a revelation* would be, and *such* it is maintained, that of *Christianity* is. The teachers of it say, and undertake to prove, that it was thus *introduced*, thus *established*, and thus *transmitted*; and we trust, that this is a strong *presumption* in its favour: especially as we can add,

4 “That the main *doctrines* contained in the *gospel* are of such a *nature*, as we might in general suppose, those of a *divine revelation* would be, rational, practical, and sublime.”

One would imagine, that in a *revelation* of a *religion from God*, the great principles of *natural religion* should be clearly asserted, and strongly maintained: Such I mean, as the existence (*r*), the unity (*s*), the perfection (*t*), and the providence of *God* (*u*); the essential and immutable difference between moral good and evil (*w*); the obligation we are under to the various branches of virtue, whether human, social, or divine (*x*); the value and immortality of the soul (*y*); and the rewards and punishments of a future state (*z*). One would easily conclude, that all these particulars must be contained in it; and that upon the whole, it

(*r*) Heb. xi. 6. (*s*) Mark xii. 29. 1 Tim. ii. 5. (*t*) Matt. v. 48. (*u*) Matt. x. 29, 30. (*w*) Isai. x. 20. 2 Cor. vi. 14. (*x*) Matt. xxii. 37, 39. Phil. iv. 8. Tit. ii. 12. (*y*) Matt. x. 28. xvi. 26. (*z*) Rom. ii. 6--10. Matt. xxv. 46.

should

should appear calculated, to form men's minds to a proper temper, rather than to amuse them with curious speculations.

It might indeed be farther supposed, and probably concluded that such a *revelation* would contain some things, which could not have been learnt from the highest improvements of natural light: And considering the infinite and unfathomable nature of the blessed God, it would be *more than probable*, that many things might be hinted at, and referred to, which our feeble faculties should not be able fully to comprehend. Yet we should expect, to find these introduced in a practical view, as directing us to duties before unknown, or suggesting powerful motives to make us resolute and constant in the discharge of the rest *. As for ceremonial and positive institutions, we should imagine, at least in the most perfect state of the *revelation*, that they should be but few, and those few plainly subservient to the great purposes of practical religion. I shall only add, that forasmuch as *pride* appears to be the most reigning corruption of the human mind, and the source of numberless irregularities; it is exceeding *probable*, that a *divine revelation* should be calculated, to *bumble* the fallen creature, and bring it to a sense of its guilt and weakness; and the more evidently that tendency appears, other things being equal, the greater reason there is to believe, that the original of such a scheme is from above.

Your own thoughts have undoubtedly prevented me in the application of these characters to the *Christian revelation*. The justice of that application I must not now illustrate at large. But I must beg leave to advance one remark, which will conclude what I have to say on this general: Which is, that as the *Christian system* is undoubtedly *worthy of God*, so considering the manner in which it is said to have been *introduced*, (separate from the *evidence* of these *facts*; which is af-

* Particularly on what terms, and to what degree, pardon and happiness might be expected by sinful creatures.

terwards to be considered,) it is extremely difficult to imagine, from whom else it could have proceeded.

I will readily allow, that neither the reasonableness of its doctrines, nor the purity of its morals, will alone prove its *divine original*; since it is possible, the reason of one man may discover that, which the reason of another approves, as being, in itself considered, either true in theory, or useful in practice. But this is not all; for in the present case it is evident, that the first teachers of *Christianity* professed, that they were taught it by *divine revelation*, and that they were empowered by God with *miraculous endowments* for the confirmation of it. Now if it were not indeed so as they professed, how can we account for so strange a phænomenon, as such a doctrine introduced with such pretences? If it were not *from God*, whence was it? From *good*, or from *evil* angels or men? Wicked creatures, as our Lord strongly intimates (*a*), would never contrive and propagate so excellent a scheme; nor can we imagine, that holy angels, or righteous men would thus be *found false witnesses of God* (*b*), or have attempted to support the cause of religion and truth, by such impious and notorious falsehoods, as their pretensions must have been, if they were falsehoods at all.

And thus much for the *first* branch of the argument: If you consider the *Christian scheme* only in *theory*, it appears *highly probable*; since a *revelation* was so much *needed*, might so reasonably be *expected*, and if it were ever given, would so far as we can judge, be thus *introduced*, and be in the main attended with such *internal characters*. And though we have not as yet expressly proved, that the *gospel* was *introduced* in such a manner, as the defenders of it assert; yet it would be strangely unaccountable, that so admirable a system of truth and duty should be advanced by the prince of darkness, and the children of wickedness; as it must have been, if the persons first employed in the

(a) Matt. xii. 25,--29. (b) 1 Cor. xv. 15.

propagation of it were not *endowed with power from on high* (c).

To embrace the *gospel* is so safe, and on the whole, so comfortable a thing, that I think a wise man would deliberately and resolutely venture his all upon it, though nothing more could be offered for its confirmation. But, blessed be God, we have a great deal more to offer in this important cause; and can add, with still greater confidence, that it is not only *in theory* thus *probable*, but,

Secondly, "That it is *in fact certain*, that *Christianity* "is indeed a *divine revelation*."

Here I confess the chief stress is to be laid; and therefore I shall insist more largely on this branch of the argument, and endeavour, by the divine assistance, to prove the *certainty* of this great *fact*. You will naturally apprehend, that I speak only of what is commonly called a *moral certainty* *: But I need speak of no more; for in many cases, such kind of *evidence* gives the mind as ample, and as rational a satisfaction, as it may find even in some supposed *mathematical demonstration*; since there it is possible, at least in a long deduction of particulars, for the most sagacious of mankind to fall into a mistake.

Now, in order to settle this grand point as clearly as I can, I think it may be proper to prove,

I. That the Books of the *new Testament*, as they are now in your hands, may be depended upon as *written* by the *first preachers* and publishers of *Christianity*. And,

II. That from hence it will certainly follow, that what they assert is *true*, and that the Religion they

(c) Luke xxiv. 49.

* Which, though it amount not to strict *demonstration*, is such kind of *evidence* as suits past matters of fact, and is sufficient to make a candid and rational enquirer easy in his assent.

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teach, brings along with it such evidences of a *Divine Authority*, as may most justly recommend it to our Acceptance.

Each of these heads might furnish out matter for many volumes; but it is my business to hint at the most obvious and important thoughts, by which they may briefly be illustrated and confirmed.

1. I am to prove to you, "That the books of the *New Testament*, now in your hands, were written by the *first preachers* and publishers of *Christianity*."

You see I confine the present proof to the books of the *New Testament*. Not that I think the authority of the *Old* to be suspected, or the use of it by any means to be despised. God forbid! It is an invaluable treasure, which demands our daily delightful and thankful perusal, and is capable of being defended in a manner which I am persuaded its subtlest enemies will never be able to answer. But the nature of my present argument, and the limits of my time, oblige me at present to wave the proof of it; any farther than as it is implied in, and dependent upon, what I have more immediately in view.

In the process of the discourse, though I shall studiously avoid any ostentation of learning, yet it will be absolutely necessary to assert some things which cannot certainly be known, without some little acquaintance with *ancient writers*. You cannot, most of you, be supposed to have formed such an acquaintance; but I take it for granted you will readily believe, that I will not *lie for God, nor talk deceitfully for him* (d). I shall say nothing of this kind, but what I know to be contained in those writings: and you may assure yourselves, that no man of common sense, whatever his moral or religious character were, would ven-

(d) Job xiii. 7.

ture in such an age as this, publickly to cite passages, as from authors in every one's hands, which he cannot prove to be contained in them.

Having premised these things, I go on to the argument; and shall advance in it by the following degrees. I shall prove,——that *Christianity* is an ancient religion;——that there was such a person as *Jesus of Nazareth*, crucified at *Jerusalem* about *seventeen hundred* years ago;——that the *first preachers* of his religion *wrote books*, which went by the name of those, that now make up the volume of our *New Testament*;——that they are preserved in the *original* to the present times;——and that the *translation* of them, which you have, is in the main such, as may be depended upon as *faithful*. And then I shall have clearly made out what I proposed in this *first* part.

I. It is certain, “that *Christianity* is not a new religion, but that it was maintained by great multitudes, quickly after the time in which *Jesus* is said to have appeared.”

That there was, considerably more than *sixteen hundred* years ago, a body of men, who went by the name of *Christians*, is almost as evident, as that a race of men was then existing in the world; nor do I know, that any have ever been wild and confident enough to dispute it. If any should for argument sake question it, they might quickly be convinced by a considerable number of *Christian writers*, who lived in the same, or the next age*, and mention it as a thing notoriously certain, that *Christianity* was then of some standing in the world; some of them giving *directions* and *exhortations* to their brethren, and others forming *apologies* to

* Such as *Clemens Romanus*, *Ignatius*, *Polycarp*, *Justin Martyr*, *Irenæus*, *Tatian*, *Athenagoras*, and *Theophilus Antiochenus*, who all wrote before the year 200, and some in the *first century*: Not to urge *Barabas*, and *Hermas*; nor to mention any of those cited by *Eusebius*, whose books are all lost, except some fragments, preserved chiefly by that excellent writer.

to their enemies, for which there could not otherwise have been the least foundation, We might have acquiesced in *their testimony*, had it been alone; but it is confirmed by that of *Jews* and *Heathens*, who, by their early invectives against the *Christians*, do most evidently prove, that there was such a body of men in the world.——The most considerable *Roman Historians*, who lived in this age, and wrote of it, are *Tacitus*, and *Suetonius*, who both published their writings above *sixteen hundred* years ago? and they are always, and very justly appealed to, as pregnant witnesses upon this occasion.---For *Tacitus* assures us, “that in *Nero’s* days,” who begun his reign about *twenty* years after the death of *Christ*, “there was a vast multitude of *Christians*, not only in *Judea*, but at *Rome* too; against whom *Nero* raised a persecution, attended with such circumstances of ignominy and cruelty, as moved the compassion even of their enemies;” of which number this *historian* evidently was. Nay he plainly intimates, that this was not the *first attempt* which had been made to crush them; though this attempt was so early as we have heard.---His contemporary *Suetonius*, in his more concise manner, attests the same.---And *Pliny* the intimate friend and correspondent of both, being employed in *Trajan’s* Time to persecute the *Christians*, writes an account of them to that emperor, which, though commonly known, must be mentioned, as it is so highly important. After having spoken very favourably of their moral character, he adds, “That many of both sexes, and of every age and rank, were infected with *this superstition*,” as he thinks fit to express it; “that it was got into the villages, as well as the cities; and that, till he begun to put the laws in execution against them, the temples of the Heathen Deities were almost deserted, and hardly any could be found who would buy victims for them.”——It might be added, that *Marcus Antoninus*, who wrote a few years after *Pliny*, mentions the *Christians*, “as exam-

“ples of a resolute and obstinate contempt of death :” And it is generally supposed, *they are the Galileans*, whom *Epictetus* speaks of, “as those whom practice had taught to despise the rage of their armed enemies.”

I shall dismiss this head with observing, that it tends greatly to the confirmation of *Christianity*, that each of these celebrated and ancient *Pagan writers*, at the same time that they attest the existence of such a body of men professing it, inform us of those extream persecutions which they underwent, in the very infancy of their religion; a *fact* also farther apparent from the *apologies* addressed by the *Christians* to their persecutors, which, whatever imperfections may attend the manner in which some of them are writ, appear to me some of the most valuable remains of antiquity, (the sacred records only excepted,) especially those of *Justin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, and *Minutius Felix*.——This fundamental point is then abundantly made out; that there were vast numbers of men, very quickly after the time when *Jesus* is said to have appeared on earth, who professed his religion, and chose to endure the greatest extremities, rather than they would abandon it. From hence it will be easy to shew,

2. “That there was certainly such a person as *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, who was crucified at *Jerusalem*, when *Pontius Pilate* was the *Roman Governor* there.”

It can never be imagined that multitudes of people, should take their names from *Christ*, and sacrifice their lives for their adherence to him, even in the same age in which he is said to have lived, if they had not been well assured, there was such a person. Now several of the authors I have mentioned plainly assert, that the *Christians* were denominated from *Christ*; nay, *Tacitus* expressly adds, “that he was put to death under *Pontius Pilate*, who was *Procurator of Judæa*, in the reign of *Tiberius*.” And it is well known, that the

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primitive *Christian apologists* often appeal to the *Acts of Pilate*, or the *Memoirs of his government*, which he, according to the custom of other Procurators, transmitted to *Rome*,) as containing an account of these transactions: And as the appeal was made to those, who had the command of the public records, we may assure ourselves such testimonies were then extant. But it is a *fact*, which our *enemies* never denied? They owned it, they even gloried in it, and upbraided the *Christians* with it. The *Jews* therefore in some of their earliest writings since those times, call *Jesus* by the ignominious name of "the man who was hanged, or crucified," and his followers, "the servants of the crucified person." And *Lucian* rallies them for deserting the pompous train of the *Heathen Deities*, to worship one whom he impiously calls "a crucified impostor."--[*Spartian* also assures us that the emperor *Alexander Severus* entertained such high thoughts of *Christ*, "that he would have admitted him into the number of his *Deities*, and have built a temple to him, had not his *Pagan* subjects vigorously opposed it." And *Porphyry*, though an inveterate enemy to *Christianity*, not only allowed there was such a person, but honoured him "as a most wise and pious man, approved by the Gods, and taken up into heaven for his distinguished virtues."—I might add a great deal more on this head; but it already appears as certain as *ancient history* can make it, and incomparably more certain than most of the facts which it has transmitted to us, that there was at the time commonly supposed such a person as *Christ*, who professed himself a Divine teacher, and who gathered many disciples, by whom his religion was afterwards published in the world.

3. It is also certain, "that the *first publishers* of "this religion wrote books, which contained an account "of the life and doctrine of *Jesus* their master, and

“ which went by the name of those that now make up
 “ our *New Testament*.”

It was in the nature of things exceeding *probable*, that what they had *seen and heard*, they would declare and publish to the world in *writing* (e); considering, how common *books* were in the age and countries in which they taught; and of how great importance an acquaintance with the history and doctrine of *Christ* was, to the purposes which they so strenuously pursued: But we have much more than such a *presumptive evidence*.

The greatest adversaries of *Christianity*, must grant, that we have *books* of great antiquity, written some *fourteen*, others *fifteen*, and some *sixteen hundred* years ago*; in which mention is made of the *life of Christ*, as *written* by many, and especially by *four* of his disciples, who by way of eminence are called *the Evangelists*. Great pains have indeed been taken to prove, that some spurious pieces were published under the names of the *apostles*, containing the history of these things: But surely this must imply, that it was a thing known and allowed, that the *apostles did write* some narrations of this kind; as counterfeit coin implies some true money, which it is designed to represent. And I am sure he must be very little acquainted with the ancient *ecclesiastical writers*, who does not know, that the *primitive Christians* made a very great difference between those writings, which we call the *canonical books* of the *New Testament*, and others: Which plainly shews, that they did not judge of writings, meerly by the names of their pretended authors, but enquired with an accuracy becoming the

(e) 1 John i. 3.

* Such as *Tatian*, *Irenæus*, *Tertullian*, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, *Origen*, *Eusebius*, and many others: See *Jones of the Canon*, Part iv. *Introduct.* *Justin Martyr's* controversy with *Tripho*, and *Origen's* with *Celsus*, prove that *Jews* and *Heathens* allow'd, not only that there were such *Books*, but that they contained the *Religion of Christians*.

importance of those pretences. The result of this enquiry was, that the *Four Gospels*, the *Acts*, *Thirteen Epistles of Paul*, one of *Peter*, and one of *John*, were received upon such evidence, that *Eusebius*, a most accurate and early critic in these things, could not learn that they had ever been disputed*: And afterwards the remaining books of the *New Testament*, *Hebrews*, *James*, the *Second of Peter*, the *Second and Third of John*, *Jude*, and the *Revelation*, were admitted as genuine, and added to the rest; though some circumstances attending them rendered their authority for a while a little dubious. On the whole it is plain, the *primitive Christians* were so satisfied in the authority of these sacred books, that they speak of them, not only as credible and authentic, but as *equal to the oracles of the Old Testament*, as *divinely inspired*, as *the words of the spirit*, as *the law and organ of God*, and as *the rule of faith*, which cannot be contradicted without great guilt; with many other expressions of the like kind, which often occur in their discourses. To which I may add, that in some of their *councils*, the *New Testament* was placed on a throne, to signify their concern, that all their controversies and actions might be determined and regulated by it.

On the whole then, you see, that the *primitive church* did receive certain pieces, which bore the same titles with the books of our *New Testament*. Now I think it is evident, they were as capable of judging whether a book was written by *Matthew*, *John*, or *Paul*, as an ancient *Roman* could be of determining whether *Horace*, *Tully*, or *Livy*, wrote those which go under their names. And I am sure, the *interest* of the former was so much more concerned in the writings of the *apostles*, than that of the latter in the compositions of the *poets*, *orators*, or even their *historians*; that there is reason to believe, they would take much greater care to inform themselves fully in the merits of the cause, and to avoid being

* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. Lib. vi. cap. 25.

imposed upon by artifice and fiction. Let me now shew,

4. "That the books of the *New Testament* have been preserved in the main *uncorrupted*, to the present time, in the *original* language in which they were written."

This is a matter of vast importance, and blessed be God, it is attended with proportionable evidence; *an evidence*, in which the hand of providence has indeed been remarkably seen; for I am confident, that there is no other ancient book in the world, which may so certainly, and so easily, be proved to be authentic.

And here, I will not argue merely from the piety of the *primitive Christians*, and the heroick resolution with which they chose to endure the greatest extremities, rather than they would deliver up their *bibles*, (though that be a consideration of some evident weight;) but shall intreat you to consider the utter *impossibility* of corrupting them. From the first ages, they were received, and read in the churches, as a part of their public worship, just as *Moses* and the *prophets* were in the *Jewish* synagogues; they were presently spread far and wide, as the boundaries of the church were increased; they were early *translated* into other languages, of which *translations* some remain to this day. Now when this was the case, how could they possibly be adulterated? Is it a thing to be supposed, or imagined, that thousands and millions of people should have come together from distant countries; and that with all their diversities of language, and customs, and I may add, of sentiments too, they should have agreed on *corrupting a book*, which they all acknowledged to be the rule of their faith, and their manners, and the great charter by which they held their eternal hopes. It were madness to believe it: especially when we consider what numbers of *hereticks* appeared in the very infancy of the church,

church, who all pretended to build their notions on *scripture*, and most of them appealed to it as the final judge of controversies; now it is certain, that these different parties of professing *Christians* were a perpetual guard upon each other, and rendered it impossible for one party to practise grossly on the sacred books, without the discovery, and the clamour of the rest.

Nor must I omit to remind you, that in every age, from the apostles time to our own, there have been numberless *quotations* made from the books of the *New Testament*; and a multitude of *commentaries* in various languages, and some of very ancient date, have been written upon them: So that if the *books* themselves were lost, I believe they might in a great measure, if not entirely, be recovered from the writings of others. And one might venture to say, that if all the *quotations*, which have ever been made from all the ancient writings now remaining in *Europe*, were to be amassed together, the bulk of them would be by no means comparable to that of the *quotations* taken from the *New Testament* alone. So that a man might with a much better face dispute, whether the writings ascribed to *Homer*, *Demosthenes*, *Virgil*, or *Cæsar*, be *in the main* such as they left them; than he could question it concerning those of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, *John*, *Peter*, *James*, and *Paul*, whether they are *in the main* so.

I say, *in the main*, because we readily allow, that the hand of a *printer*, or of a *transcriber*, might chance in some places to insert one letter or word for another, and the *various readings* of this, as well as of all other ancient books, prove, that this has sometimes been the case. Nevertheless those *various readings* are generally of so little importance, that he who can urge them as an objection against the assertion we are now maintaining, must have little judgment, or little integrity; and indeed, after those excellent things which have been said on the subject by many defenders of

of *Christianity*, if he have read their writings, he must have little modesty too.

Since then it appears, that the books of the *New Testament*, as they now stand in the *original*, are, without any material alteration, such as they were, when they came from the hands of the persons whose names they bear; nothing remains to compleat this part of the argument, but to shew,

5. "That the *translation* of them, now in your hands, may be depended upon, as in all things most material, agreeable to the *original*."

This is a *fact*, of which the generality of you are not capable of judging immediately, yet it is a matter of great importance: It is therefore a very great pleasure to me to think, what ample evidence you may find another way, to make your minds as easy on this head, as you could reasonably wish them. I mean, by the concurrent *testimony* of others, in circumstances in which you cannot imagine they would unite to deceive you.

There are, to be sure, very few of *us*, whose office it is publicly to *preach the gospel*, who have not examined this matter with care, and who are not capable of judging in so easy a case. I believe you have seen few in the place where I now stand, that could not have told you, as I now solemnly do, that, on a diligent comparison of *our translation* with the *original*, we find *that* of the *New Testament*, (and I might also add, that of the *Old*,) in the main faithful and judicious. You know indeed, that we do not scruple on some occasions to animadvert upon it; but you also know, that these remarks affect not the fundamentals of religion, and seldom reach any farther than the beauty of a figure, or at most the connection of an argument. Nay, I can confidently say, that, to the best of my knowledge and remembrance, as there is no *copy* of the *Greek*, so neither is there any *translation* of

of the *New Testament* which I have seen, whether ancient or modern, how defective or faulty soever, from which all the principal facts and doctrines of *Christianity* might not be learnt, so far as the knowledge of them is necessary to salvation, or even to some considerable degrees of edification in piety. Nor do I except from this remark, even that most erroneous and corrupt *version*, published by the *English jesuits* at *Rheims*, which is undoubtedly one of the worst that ever appeared in our language.

But I desire not, that with respect to *our own translation* of the *New Testament*, a matter of so great moment as the fidelity of it should rest on *my testimony* alone, or entirely on *that* of any of my brethren, for whose integrity and learning you may have the greatest and justest esteem. I rejoice to say, that this is a head, on which we *cannot* possibly deceive you, if we were ever so desirous to do it. And indeed in this respect, *that* is our advantage, which in others is our great calamity, I mean *the diversity of our religious opinions*. It is certain, that wheresoever there is a body of *dissenters* from the public establishment, who do yet agree with their brethren of that establishment in the use of the *same translation*, though they are capable of examining it, and judging of it; there is as great evidence as could reasonably be desired, that *such a translation* is in the main *right*: for if it were in any considerable article corrupted, most of the other debates would quickly lose themselves in this: And though such *dissenters* had all that candor, tenderness, and respect for their fellow Christians, which I hope we shall always endeavour to maintain, yet they would, no doubt, think themselves obliged in conscience to bear a warm and loud testimony against so crying an abomination, as they would another day appear free from the guilt of a confederacy, to poison the public fountains, and destroy the souls of men. But we make no complaint on this subject; we all unite in bearing our testimony to *the oracles of God*,

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God, as delivered in our own language. Oh that we were equally united in regulating our doctrine, and our discipline, our worship, and our practice by them!

You see then, on the whole, how much reason there is to believe, "that the books of the *New Testament*, as they are now in your hands, were *written* by those whose names they bear, even the *first preachers* and publishers of *Christianity*." This is the grand point; and from hence it will follow, by a train of easy and natural consequences, that *the gospel is most certainly true*: But that is a topic of argument abundantly sufficient to furnish out matter for another discourse. May *God* command his blessing on what has been already laid before us, that through the operation of his *spirit*, it may be useful for establishing our regard to the scripture, and for confirming our faith in that Almighty Redeemer, who is *the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last (f)*; whom to know is life everlasting (g), and in whom to believe is the great security of our eternal salvation! *Amen.*

(f) Rev. i. 8, 17.

(g) John xvii. 3.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

The Evidences of Christianity deduced
from the New Testament allowed to
be genuine.

[DODDRIDGE.]

2 PET. i. 16.

—We have not followed cunningly devised Fables—.

WHEN we are addressing ourselves to an audience of professing *Christians*, I think we may reasonably take it for granted, in the main course of our ministry, that they *believe the truth of the gospel*, and may argue with them on that supposition. To be ever laying the foundation would be the part of an unwise builder, and be greatly detrimental to your edification and comfort, and I may add, to our own. Nevertheless, *Christians*, we do not desire, that you should take it merely upon our word, that your religion is *divine*, and your scriptures *inspired*. We desire, that your faith, as well as your worship, should be a *reasonable service* *; and wish, that, in this respect, *all the Lord's people were as prophets* †; that as every *Christian* is in his sphere *set for the defence of the gospel* ‖, each might in some measure be able to assert its truth, and if possible, *to convince*

* Rom. xii. 1.

† Numb. xi. 29.

‖ Phil. i. 17.

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gainfayers (a). Therefore, as we are often hinting at the chief arguments, on which this sacred cause is established, (established, I trust, so firmly, that *the gates of hell shall never prevail against it* (b);) so I thought it might be agreeable and useful, on this occasion, to state them a little more largely, in their proper connection and mutual dependance. And I chose the rather to do it, as these discourses are especially intended for *young people*, who in an age in which infidelity so much abounds, can hardly expect to pass through the world, if they are called to converse much in it, without some attacks on their faith; which may be very dangerous, if they are not provided with some armour of proof against them. It is indeed, (as I before observed) above all things to be desired, that *the heart may be established with grace* (c); for we are then most secure from the danger of *forgetting God's precepts* (d), when they have been the blessed means of *quickening us* to a divine life. Yet as other arguments have their use, and in some degree their necessity too, I shall go on briefly to propose them.

I beg therefore, that you would renew your attention, while I resume the thread of my discourse, in an entire dependance on the blessed *spirit*, by whom the *gospel* was at first revealed and confirmed, to add success to this humble attempt for its service, and for your edification.

I am now shewing you, that *Christianity*, which before appeared in *theory* probable and rational, has in *fact* a convincing evidence: not only that *it may be*, but that *it certainly is true*;—as it is certain, that the *New Testament*, as now in your hands, is *genuine*;—and as it may with great evidence be argued from thence, that the *gospel* is a *revelation* from God. The *first* of these points I have endeavoured to prove at large; and without repeating what I said in confirmation of it, I now proceed to shew,

(a) Tit. i. 9.

(b) Matth. xvi. 18.

(c) Heb. xiii. 9.

(d) Psal. cxix. 93.

- II. "That from allowing the *New Testament* to be
 "genuine, it will certainly follow, that *Christianity*
 "is a *divine revelation*."

And here a man is, at first, ready to be lost in the multiplicity of arguments which surround him. It is very easy to find *proofs*; but difficult to range and dispose them in such an *order*, as best to illustrate and confirm each other. Now I chuse to offer them in the following *series*, which seems to me the most natural, and perhaps may be most intelligible to you.

The *authors* of the books contained in the *New Testament* were certainly *capable of judging* concerning the truth of the *facts* they attested;—their *character*, so far as we can judge of it by their writings, renders them *worthy of regard*;—and they were *under no temptation* to attempt to impose on the world by such a story as they have given us, if it had been false: so that considering all things, there is no reason to believe they *would attempt* it:—But if they *had*, they must probably *have perished* in the attempt, and could *never have gained credit* in the world, had their testimony been false.—Nevertheless it is certain in fact, that they *did gain credit*, and succeed in a most amazing manner against all opposition.—It is certain therefore, that the *facts* they assert *were true*; and if they were *true*, then it was reasonable for their contemporaries, and is reasonable for us, to receive the *gospel* as a *divine revelation*;—especially, if we consider what has happened in the world for the *confirmation of it*, since it was first propagated by them. This is the conclusion to which I was to lead you; and I beg, you would seriously consider each of the steps, by which we arrive at it.

- i. It is exceeding evident, "that the *writers* of the
 "*New Testament* certainly *knew*, whether the *facts*
 "they asserted were true, or false."

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And this they *must have known* for this plain reason; because they tell us, they did not trust merely to the *report*, even of persons whom they thought most credible; but were present *themselves*, when several of the most important facts happened, and so received them on the *testimony of their own senses*. On this *St. John* in his *epistle* lays a very great and reasonable stress: *That which we have seen with our eyes*, and that not only by a sudden glance, but *which we have attentively looked upon*, and *which even our hands have handled of the word of life*, i. e. of *Christ* and his *gospel*,—*declare we unto you* (a).

Let the common sense of mankind judge here. Did not *Matthew* and *John* certainly *know*, whether they had personally and familiarly *conversed* with *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, or not? whether he had *chosen* them for his constant attendants and *apostles*? whether they had seen him *heal the sick*, *dispossess devils*, and *raise the dead*? and whether they themselves had received from him such *miraculous endowments*, as they say he bestowed upon them? Did not *they know* whether he fell into the hands of his enemies, and was publicly *put to death*, or not? Did not *John know*, whether he saw him *expiring on the cross*, or not? and whether he received from him the *dying charge* which he records (b)? Did he not *know*, whether he saw him *wounded* in the side *with a spear*, or not? and whether he did, or did not see that *effusion of blood and water*, which was an infallible argument of his being really dead? Concerning which, it being so material a circumstance, he adds, *He that saw it bare record*, and *he knoweth that he saith true* (c); i. e. that it was a case, in which he could not possibly be deceived. And with regard to *Christ's resurrection*, did he not *certainly know*, whether he *saw our Lord* again and again; and whether he *handled his body*, that he might be sure it was not a mere phantom? What one circumstance of his life could he *certainly know*, if he were mistaken in this?

(a) 1 John i. 1, 3.

(b) John xix. 27.

(c) John xix. 35.

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Did not *Luke* know, whether he was in the ship with *Paul*, when that extraordinary wreck happened, by which they were thrown ashore on the island of *Malta*? Did he not know, whether while they were lodged together in the governor's house, *Paul* miraculously healed one of the family, and many other diseased persons in the island, as he positively asserts that he did (a)?

Did not *Paul* certainly know, whether *Christ* appeared to him on the way to *Damascus*, or not? whether he was blind, and afterwards on the prayer of a fellow-disciple received his sight? or was that a circumstance in which there could be room for mistake? Did he not know, whether he received such extraordinary revelations, and extraordinary powers, as to be able by the imposition of his hands, or by the words of his mouth, to work miracles, and even to convey supernatural endowments to others?

To add no more, Did not *Peter* know, whether he saw the glory of *Christ's* transfiguration, and heard that voice, to which he so expressly refers, when he says in the text, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables, —but were eye-witnesses of his majesty, —when there came such a voice to him; —and this voice we heard* (b).

Now *Matthew*, *John*, *Luke*, *Paul*, and *Peter*, are by far the most considerable writers of the *New Testament*; and I am sure, when you reflect on these particulars, you must own, that there are few historians, ancient or modern, that could so certainly judge of the truth of the facts they have related. You may perhaps think, I have enlarged too much in stating so clear a case: but you will please to remember, it is the foundation of the whole argument; and that this branch of it alone cuts off infidels from that refuge which I believe they would generally chuse, that of pleading *the apostles were enthusiasts*; and leaves them silent, unless they will say they were impostors: For you evidently see, that could we suppose these facts to be false, they could by no means pretend an involun-

(a) Acts xxviii. 7,---9.

(b) 2 Pet. i. 16, 18.

tary mistake, but must, in the most criminal and aggravated sense, as *Paul* himself expresses it, *be found false witnesses of God* (a). But how unreasonable it would be to charge them with so notorious a crime, will in part appear, if we consider,

2. "That the *character* of these writers, so far as we
 " can judge by their works, seems to render them
 " *worthy of regard*, and leaves no room to imagine
 " they intended to deceive us."

I shall not stay to shew at large, that they appear to have been persons of *natural sense*, and at the time of their writing, of a *composed mind*; for I verily believe, no man that ever read the *New Testament* with attention, could believe they were *idiots or madmen*. Let the discourses of *Christ* in the *Evangelists*, of *Peter* and *Paul* in the *Acts*, as well as many passages in the *Epistles* be perused; and I will venture to say, he who is not even charmed with them, must be a stranger to all the justest rules of polite criticism: but he who suspects, that the *writers* wanted *common sense*, must himself be most evidently destitute of it; and he who can suspect they might possibly be *distracted*, must himself, in this instance at least, be just as *mad* as he imagines them to have been.

It was necessary however just to touch upon this; because, unless we are satisfied, that a person *be himself* in what he writes, we cannot pretend to determine his *character* from his writings. Having premised this, I must intreat you, as you peruse the *New Testament*, to observe what evident marks it bears, of simplicity and integrity, of piety and benevolence; which when you have observed, you will find them pleading the cause of its *authors*, with a resistless, though a gentle eloquence; and powerfully persuading the mind, that men who were capable of writing so excellently well, are not, without the strongest evidence, to be suspected of acting so detestably ill, as we must suppose they did,

(a) 1 Cor. xv. 15.

if in this solemn manner they were carrying on an *imposture*, in such circumstances as attended the case before us. For,

(1.) The *manner* in which they tell their amazing story, is most happily adapted to gain our belief. For as they tell it with a great *detail of circumstances*, which would by no means be prudent in *legendary writers*, because it leaves so much the more room for confutation; so they also do it in the most *easy* and *natural manner*. There is no air of declamation and harangue; nothing that looks like artifice and design: No apologies, no encomiums, no characters, no reflections, no digressions: But the *facts* are recounted with great simplicity, just as they seem to have happened; and those *facts* are left to speak for themselves, and their great author. It is plain, that the rest of these *writers*, as well as the apostle *Paul*, did not affect *excellency of speech, or flights of eloquence*, (as the phrase signifies), but *determined to know nothing*, though amongst the most learned and polite, *save Jesus Christ, even him that was crucified* (o): A conduct that is the more to be admired, when we consider how extraordinary a theme their's was, and with what abundant of variety of most pathetick declamation it would easily have furnished any common writer; so that one would really wonder, how they could forbear it. But they rightly judged, that a vain affectation of ornament, when recording such a story as of their own knowledge, might perhaps have brought their sincerity into question, and so have rendered *the cross of Christ of none effect* (p).

(2.) Their integrity does likewise evidently appear in the *freedom* with which they mention those circumstances, which might have exposed *their master* and *themselves* to the greatest contempt, amongst prejudiced and inconsiderate men; such as they knew they must generally expect to meet with.——As to *their master*, they scruple not to own, that his country was infa-

(o) 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2.

(p) 1 Cor. i. 17.

mous (*q*), his birth and education mean (*r*), and his life indigent (*s*); that he was most disdainfully rejected by the rulers (*t*), and accused of sabbath-breaking, (*u*) blasphemy (*w*), and sedition (*x*); that he was reviled by the populace, as a debauchee (*y*) a lunatick (*z*), and a dæmoniac (*a*); and at last, by the united rage of both rulers and people, was publickly executed as the vilest of malefactors, with all imaginable circumstances of ignominy, scorn, and abhorrence (*b*): Nor do they scruple to own that terror and distress of spirit into which he was thrown by his sufferings (*c*), though this was a circumstance, at which some of the *Heatben* took the greatest offence, as utterly unworthy so excellent and divine a person.---As to *themselves*, the *apostles* readily confess, not only the meanness of their original employments (*d*), and the scandals of their former life (*e*); but their prejudices, their follies, and their faults, after *Christ* had honoured them with so holy a calling: They acknowledge their slowness of apprehension under so excellent a teacher (*f*), their unbelief (*g*), their cowardice (*h*), their ambition (*i*), their rash zeal (*k*), and their foolish contentions (*l*). So that on the whole, they seem every where to forget, that they are writing of themselves, and appear not at all solicitous about their own reputation, but only that they might represent the matter just as it was, whether they went *through honour or dishonour, through evil report or good report* (*m*). Nor is this all; for,

(*q*) John i. 45, 46. vii. 52. (*r*) Luke ii. 4,---7. Matt. xiii. 55. Mark vi. 3. (*s*) Matt. viii. 20. Luke viii. 3. (*t*) John vii. 48. 1 Cor. ii. 8. (*u*) John v. 16. 14. 16. (*w*) Matt. ix. 3. xxvi. 65. John x. 31,---36. (*x*) Luke xxiii. 2. John xix. 12. (*y*) Matt. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34. (*z*) John x. 20. (*a*) John vii. 20. viii. 48. (*b*) Matt. xxvii. 32,---44. (*c*) Matt. xxvi. 38. Luke xxii. 44. Matt. xxvii. 46. (*d*) Matt. iv. 18,---21. Luke v. 10. (*e*) Matt. ix. 9. x. 3. Luke v. 8. Acts xxii. 4, 5. xxvii. 11. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. (*f*) Mark ix. 32. Luke ix. 45. xviii. 34. Matt. xvi. 22, 23. (*g*) Matt. viii. 26. xvii. 20. Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 25. John xx. 24,---27. (*h*) Matt. xxvi. 56. 69,---74. Gal. ii. 11,---14. (*i*) Matt. xx. 20,---24. Mark x. 35,---44. Luke ix. 46. xxii. 24. 26. (*k*) Luke ix. 54. Mark ix. 38. (*l*) Mark ix. 34. Acts xv. 37,---40. (*m*) 2 Cor. vi. 8.

(3). It

(3). It is certain, that there are in their writings the most genuine *traces*, not only of a plain and honest, but a most *pious* and *devout*, a most *benevolent* and *generous disposition*. These appear especially in the *Epistolary* parts of the *New Testament*, where indeed we should most reasonably expect to find them: And of these I may confidently affirm, that the greater progress any one has made, in love to *God* (*n*), in zeal for his glory (*o*), in a compassionate and generous concern for the present and future happiness of mankind (*p*); the more humble (*q*), and candid (*r*), and temperate (*s*), and pure (*t*) he is; the more ardently he loves truth, and the more steadily he is determined to suffer the greatest extremity in its defence (*u*); in a word, the more his heart is weaned from the present world (*w*), and the more it is fired with the prospects of a glorious immortality (*x*); the more pleasure will he take in reading those writings, the more will he relish the spirit which discovers itself in them, and find, that *as face answers to face in water*, so do the traces of piety and goodness, which appear there, answer to

(*n*) 1 Cor. viii. 3. Tit. iii. 4,--7. 1 John iv. 16,--21. v. 1,--3. (*o*) Rom. vi. 12, 13. xii. 1. xiv. 7, 8. 1 Cor. vi. 20. x. 31. 2 Cor. iv. 15. 1 Pet. iv. 11. (*p*) Acts xx. 20, 21, 31,--35. xxvi. 29. Rom. ix. 1,--3. xiii. 8,--x. xv. 1, 2. 1 Cor. x. 24. 2 Cor. xii. 15. Gal. vi. 10. Phil. ii. 4. 1 Thes. ii. 7, 8, 11, 12. 1 Tim. ii. 1. (*q*) Rom. xii. 3, 16. 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10. Eph. iii. 8. Col. iii. 12. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. 1 Pet. v. 5. (*r*) Rom. xiv. 3, 10, 13, 19. xv. 1, 2. 1 Cor. viii. 9,--13. xiii. 4,--7. Gal. v. 22. (*s*) Rom. xiii. 13, 14. 1 Cor. ix. 27. Gal. v. 24. Col. iii. 5. 2 Pet. i. 6. (*t*) 2 Cor. vii. 1. Phil. iv. 8. 1 Thess. iv. 3, 4. 2 Tim. ii. 21. Heb. x. 22. xii. 14. Jam. i. 27. 1 John iii. 3. (*u*) Acts xx. 24. 2 Cor. i. 12. iv. 2. xiii. 8. Phil. ii. 17, 18. 2 Tim. iv. 7. (*w*) 2 Cor. iv. 18. Gal. vi. 14. Phil. iv. 11, 12. Col. iii. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 6,--10. 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4. 1 John ii. 15, 16. (*x*) 2 Cor. v. 1,--8. Phil. i. 21,--23. 2 Tim. i. 12. iv. 8. Tit. ii. 13.

N. B. Those who are acquainted with the *New Testament* will know, that this is but a small specimen of the *Texts* which might easily be collected on each of these heads: yet were the energy of these few attentively considered, I cannot but think, that every well disposed mind would be deeply struck, and powerfully convinced by them.

those which a good man feels in his own soul. Nay, I will add, that the warm and genuine workings of that excellent and holy temper, which every where discovers itself in the *New Testament*, have for many ages been the most effectual means of spreading a spirit of virtue and piety in the world: and what of it is to be found in these degenerate days, seems principally owing to these incomparable and truly divine writings.

[Where then there are such *genuine marks* of an *excellent character*, not only in laboured discourses, but in *epistolary* writings, and those sometimes addressed to particular and intimate friends, to whom the mind naturally opens itself with the greatest freedom, surely no candid and equitable judge would lightly believe them to be all *counterfeit*; or would imagine, without strong proof, that persons who breathe such exalted sentiments of virtue and piety, should be guilty of any *notorious wickedness*: and in proportion to the degree of enormity and aggravation attending such a *supposed crime*, it may justly be expected, that the evidence of their having really committed it, should be unanswerably strong and convincing.

Now it is most certain, on the principles laid down above, that if the *testimony* of the *apostles* was *false*, they must have acted as detestable and villainous a part, as one can easily conceive. To be *found* (as the apostle with his usual energy expresses it), *false witnesses of God* (y) in any single instance, and solemnly to declare him miraculously to have done, what we know in our own consciences was never done at all, would be an audacious degree of *impiety*, to which none but the most abandoned of mankind could arrive. Yet, if the *testimony* of the *apostles* was *false*, as we have proved they could not be *themselves mistaken* in it, this must have been their conduct, and that, not in one single instance only, but in a thousand. Their life must, in effect, be one continued and per-

(y) 1 Cor. xv. 15.

petual scene of perjury; and all the most solemn actions of it (in which they were speaking to God, or speaking of him as the God and Father of Christ, from whom they received their mission and powers), must be a most profane and daring insult on all the acknowledged perfections of his nature.

And the *inhumanity* of such a conduct would, on the whole, have been equal to its *impiety*. For it was deceiving men in their most important interests, and persuading them to venture their whole future happiness on the power and fidelity of *one*, whom on this supposition, they knew to have been an *impostor*, and justly to have suffered a capital punishment for his crimes.

It would have been *great guilt*, to have given the hearts and devotions of men so wrong a turn, even though they had found magistrates ready to espouse and establish, yea, and to enforce the religion they taught. But to labour to propagate it in the midst of the most vigorous and severe opposition from them, must equally enhance the *guilt*, and *folly* of the undertaking: for by this means they made themselves accessory to the ruin of thousands; and all the calamities, which fell on such proselytes, or even on their remotest descendants, for the sake of *Christianity*, would be in a great measure chargeable on these *first preachers* of it. The blood of honest, yea, and (supposing them, as you must, to have been involuntarily deceived), of pious, worthy, and heroic persons, who might otherwise have been the greatest blessings to the public, would, in effect, be crying for vengeance against them; and the distresses of the widows and orphans, which those *martyrs* might leave behind them, would join to swell the account.

So that on the whole, the *guilt* of those *malefactors*, who are from time to time the victims of public justice, even for robbery, murder, or treason, is *small* when compared with *that* which we have now been supposing: And corrupt as human nature is, it ap-

pears to me utterly improbable, that *twelve men* should be found, I will not say, in one little nation, but even on the whole face of the earth, who could be capable of entering into so black a confederacy, on any terms whatsoever.

And now, in this view of the case, make a serious pause, and compare with it, what we have just been saying of the *character* of the *apostles* of *Jesus*, so far as an indifferent person could conjecture it from their *writings*; and then say, whether you can in your hearts believe them to have been these *abandoned wretches*, at once the reproach and astonishment of mankind? You cannot surely believe such things of *any*; and much less of *them*, unless it shall appear, they were in some peculiar circumstances of *strong temptation*; and what those circumstances could be, it is difficult even for imagination to conceive.

But history is so far from suggesting any unthought-of fact to help our imagination on this head, that it bears strongly the contrary way; and hardly any part of my work is easier, than to shew,]

3. "That they were *under no temptation* to forge a story of this kind, or to publish it to the world, knowing it to be *false*."

They could reasonably expect no gain, no reputation by it: But on the contrary, supposing it an *imposture*, they must, with the most ordinary share of prudence, have foreseen infamy and ruin, as the certain consequences of attempting it. For the grand foundation of their scheme was, that *Jesus of Nazareth*, who was crucified at *Jerusalem* by the *Jewish rulers*, was *the Son of God*, and *the Lord of all things*. I appeal to your consciences, whether this looks at all like the contrivance of artful and designing men. It was evidently charging upon the *princes* of their country the most criminal and aggravated *murder*; indeed, all things considered, the most enormous *act of wickedness*,

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kedness, which the sun had ever seen. They might therefore depend upon it, that *these rulers* would immediately employ all their art and power, to confute their *testimony*, and to destroy their *persons*. Accordingly one of them was presently *stoned* (z) and another quickly after *beheaded* (a); and most of the rest were *scattered abroad* into strange cities (b), where they would be sure to be received with great *prejudices*, raised against them amongst the *Jews* by reports from *Jerusalem*, and vastly strengthened by their expectations of a *temporal Messiah*; *expectations*, which, as the apostles knew by their own experience, it was exceeding difficult to root out of mens minds; *expectations*, which would render the doctrine of *Christ crucified*, an inseparable *stumbling-block to the Jews* (c).

Nor could they expect a much better reception amongst the *Gentiles*; with whom their business was, to persuade them to renounce the Gods of their ancestors, and to depend on a person who had died the death of a malefactor and a slave; to persuade them to forego the pompous idolatries in which they had been educated, and all the sensual indulgences with which their religion (if it might be called *a religion*,) was attended, to worship *one invisible God* through *one Mediator*, in the most plain and simple manner; and to receive a set of precepts, most directly calculated to controul and restrain, not only the enormities of men's actions, but the irregularities of their hearts. A most difficult undertaking! and to engage them to this, they had no other arguments to bring, but such as were taken from the views of an invisible state of happiness or misery, of which they asserted their *crucified Jesus* to be the supreme disposer; who should another day dispense his blessings, or his vengeance, as the *Gospel* had been embraced, or rejected. Now, could it be imagined, that men would easily be persuaded, merely on the credit of their affirmation, or

(z) Acts vii. 59.

(a) Acts xii. 2.

(b) Acts viii. 1, 4. xi. 9.

(c) 1 Cor. i. 23.

in compliance with their importunity, to believe things which to their prejudiced minds would appear so improbable, and to submit to impositions, to their corrupt inclinations so insupportable? And if they could not persuade them to it, what could the *Apostles* then expect? What, but to be *insulted* as *fools* or *madmen*, by one sort of people; and by another, to be *persecuted* with the most savage and outrageous cruelty, as *blasphemers* of the Gods, as *seducers* of the people, and as *disturbers* of the public peace? All which we know accordingly happened (*d*): Nay, they assure us, that their *Lord* had often *warned them of it* (*e*); and that *they themselves expected it* (*f*), and thought it necessary to admonish their *followers* to *expect it* too (*g*): And it appears, that far from *drawing back* upon that account, as they would surely have done if they had been governed by secular motives, they became so much the more zealous and courageous, and encouraged each other to *resist even to blood* (*h*).—Now as this is a great evidence of the integrity and piety of their *character*, and thus illustrates the *former head*; so it serves to the purpose now immediately in view, *i. e.* it proves how *improbable* it is, that any person of common sense should engage in an *imposture*, from which (as many have justly observed,) they could, on their own principles, have nothing to expect, but ruin in this world, and damnation in the next. When therefore we consider, and compare their *character*, and their *circumstances*, it appears *utterly improbable* on

(*d*) [Compare Acts v. 40. vii. 57, 58. viii. 1. ix. 1, 2. xxvi. 10, 11. ix. 23, 24. xii. 1,---4. xiii. 50. xiv. 5, 19. xvi. 19,---24. xvii. 5,---8. xviii. 12, 13. xx. 3. xxi. 27, 28. xxii. 22. xxiii. 14. all which texts relate to the *persecution* of the *Christians*, either by *Jews* or *Gentiles*; And compare also the scriptures cited in the *last note* on this *sermon*.]

(*e*) Matt. x. 16,---25. xxiii. 34. Mark x. 29, 30, 39. Luke xiv. 27. xxi. 12, 17. John xv. 20, 21. xvi. 2,---33. xxi. 18, 19. Acts ix. 16. (*f*) Acts xx. 23, 24. xxi. 13. 1 Cor. iv. 9. 2 Cor. xii. 10. 1 Theff. iii. 3, 4. 2 Tim. iv. 6. (*g*) Acts xiv. 22. 2 Tim. iii. 12. iv. 5. Jam. v. 10, 11. 1 Pet. ii. 20, 21. iv. 1, 12,---16. v. 9. (*h*) Heb. xii. 4.

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various accounts, that they would have *attempted* in this article to impose upon the world. But suppose, that in consequence of some unaccountable, as well as undiscoverable frenzy, they had ventured on the *attempt*, it is easy to shew,

4. "That humanly speaking, they must quickly *have perished* in it, and their foolish cause must have died with them, without ever *gaining any credit* in the world."

One may venture to say this in general, on the principles which I before laid down. But it appears still more evident, when we consider the *nature* of the *fact* they asserted, in conjunction with the *methods* they took to engage men to believe it : *methods*, which had the *apostles* been *impostors*, must have had the most direct tendency to ruin both their scheme and themselves.

(1). Let us a little more particularly reflect on the *nature* of that grand *fact*, the death, resurrection, and exaltation of *Christ*; which, as I observed, was the great *foundation* of the *Christian scheme*, as first exhibited by the *apostles*.----The *resurrection* of a dead man, and his *ascension into*, and *abode in* the upper world, was so strange a thing, that a thousand objections would immediately be raised against it; and some extraordinary proof would justly be required as a balance to them. Now I wish the rejecters of the *gospel* would set themselves to invent some *hypothesis*, which should have any appearance of probability, to shew how such an amazing story should ever *gain credit* in the world, if it had not some very convincing proof. Where, and when, could it first begin to be received? Was it in the same, or a succeeding age? Was it at *Jerusalem*, the spot of ground on which it is said to have happened, or in *Greece*, or *Italy*, or *Asia*, or *Africa*?

Africa? You may change the scene, and the time, as you please; but you cannot change the difficulty.

Take it in a parallel instance. Suppose *twelve men* in *London* were now to affirm, that a person executed there as a malefactor in a public manner, a month, or six weeks ago, or if you please, a year, or five or ten years since, for it is much the same, was a prophet sent from *God* with extraordinary powers, that he was raised from the dead, that they conversed with him after his revival, and at last saw him taken up into heaven: would their united *testimony* make them be *believed there*?----Or suppose them, if you please, to disperse, and that one or two of them should come *hither*, and go on to more distant places, suppose *Leicester*, *Nottingham*, or *York*, and tell their story there; and that others were to carry it over to *Paris*, or *Amsterdam*, or to *Vienna*, or *Madrid*: could they expect any more *credit* with *us*, or with *them*; or hope for any thing better, than to be looked upon as *lunatics*, and treated as such?----And if they should go into other places, and attempt to mend their scheme, by saying their master was put to death an hundred, or two hundred years ago, when there could be no historical evidence of it discovered, and no proof given but their own confident assertion: would they remove, or would they not rather increase, the difficulty?----Or would they, in any of these cases, *gain credit* by the most dextrous tricks of *legerdemain*, of which you can suppose them masters? Especially if they should undertake, in consequence of such *supposed facts*, to engage men to renounce the religion in which they had been educated; to deny themselves in their dearest passions, and most important worldly interests; and even, probably, to hazard their liberties and their lives, in dependence on a future reward, to be received in a place and state, which no man living on earth had ever seen or known? You would readily allow *this* to be an insupportable case: and why should you suppose it to have happened sixteen or seventeen hundred

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hundred years ago? You may assure yourselves, that the reason, and the passions of mankind, were *then* as strong, as they are *now*.---But let us a little more particularly consider,

(2). The *manner*, in which the *apostles* undertook to prove the truth of their *testimony* to this *fact*; and it will evidently appear, that instead of confirming *their scheme*, it must have been sufficient utterly to have overthrown it, had it been itself the most *probable imposture* that the wit of man could ever have contrived.---You know, they did not merely assert, that they had seen *miracles* wrought by this *Jesus*, but that he had endowed *themselves* with a variety of *miraculous powers*. And these they undertook to display, not in such idle and useless tricks as sleight of hand might perform, but in such solid and important works, as appeared worthy a divine interposition, and entirely superior to human power: restoring, as they pretend, sight to the *blind*, soundness to *lepers*, activity to the *lame*, and in some instances, life to the *dead*. Nor were these things undertaken *in a corner*, in a circle of friends, or dependants; nor were they said to be wrought on such, as might be suspected of being *confederates* in the fraud: but they were done often in the *public streets*, in the sight of *enemies*, on the persons of such as were utter *strangers* to the *apostles*, but sometimes *well known* to neighbours and spectators, as having long laboured under these calamities, to human skill utterly incurable (*i*). Would *impostors* have made such pretensions as these? Or if they had, must they not immediately have been exposed and ruined?

Nor is there any room at all to object, that perhaps the *apostles* might not undertake to do these things *on the spot*, but only assert they had done them *elsewhere*: for even then, it would have been impossible they

(i) Acts iii. 1,---10. v. 15. ix. 33,---42. xiv. 8,---10. xix. 11, 12, xx. 9,---12. xxviii. 7,---9.

should have gained credit; and they would have seemed *the less credible*, on account of such a pretence. Whatever appearances there might have been of gravity, integrity and piety, in the conversation of *Peter*, (for instance,) very few, especially few that had known but little of him, would have taken it upon his word, that he saw *Jesus* raise *Lazarus* from the dead at *Bethany*: but fewer yet would have believed it upon his affirmation, had it been ever so solemn, that he had himself raised *Dorcas* at *Joppa*; unless he had done some extraordinary work before them, correspondent at least, if not equal to that. You will easily think of invincible objections, which otherwise might have been made; and undoubtedly, the more such assertions had been multiplied, every new person, and scene, and fact, had been an additional advantage given to the enemy, to have detected and confuted the whole scheme, which *Peter* and his associates had thus endeavoured to establish.

But to come still closer to the point: if the *New Testament* be genuine, (as I have already proved it,) then it is certain, that the *apostles* pretend to have wrought miracles in the very presence of those, to whom their writings were addressed; nay more, they profess likewise to have conferred those miraculous gifts, in some considerable degrees, on others (*k*), even on the very persons to whom they write; and they appeal to their consciences as to the truth of it. And could there possibly be room for *delusion* here? It is exceedingly remarkable to this purpose, that *Paul* makes this appeal to the *Corinthians* (*l*), and *Galatians* (*m*), when there were amongst them some persons disaffected to him, who were taking all opportunities to sink his character, and destroy his influence: and could they have wished for a better opportunity, than such an appeal? an appeal, which, had not the *fact* it sup-

(*k*) Acts viii. 17. xix. 6. (l) 1 Cor. i. 5, 7, ii. 4, 5. ix. 2. xii. 8, — 11, 28, — 30. xiv. 1, — 18, 26, & seq. 2 Cor. xi. 5, 6. xii. 12, 13. xiii. 3, 10. (m) Gal. iii. 2, 5.

posed been *certain*, far from recovering those that were wavering in their esteem, must have been sufficient utterly to disgust his most cordial and steady friends.---And the same remark may be applied to the *advice* and *reproofs*, which the *apostle* there gives, relating to the use and abuse of their *spiritual gifts* (n); which had been most notoriously absurd, and even ridiculous, had not the *Christians* to whom he wrote, been really possessed of them. And *these gifts* were so plainly *supernatural*, that (as it has often been observed,) if it be allowed, that *miracles* can prove a divine revelation, and that the *first epistle* to the *Corinthians* be *genuine*, (of which, by the way, there is at least as pregnant evidence, as that any part of the *New Testament* is so), then it follows by a sure and easy consequence, that *Christianity is true*. Nevertheless other arguments are not to be forgot in this survey.— And therefore, as I have proved *under this head*, that had the *testimony* of the *apostles* been *false*, it is not to be imagined, that they could have *gained credit* at all; and especially, when they had put the proof of their cause on such a footing, as we are sure they did; I am now to shew you,

5. “ That it is *certain in fact*, that the *apostles* did gain “ early *credit*, and succeeded in a most wonderful “ manner;” from whence it will follow, that their *testimony* was *true*.

That the *apostles* did indeed *gain credit* in the world, is evident, from what I before offered to prove the early prevalence of *Christianity* in it; and may farther be confirmed, from many passages in the *New Testament*. And here, I insist not so much on express *historical testimonies*, though some of them are very remarkable; especially that of the *Brethren* at *Jerusalem*, who speak of *many myriads of believing Jews* assembled at the feast of *Pentecost* (o). But I argue from

(n) 1 Cor. xii. 1,--7. xiv. *per tot.*

(o) Acts xxi. 20.

the *epistles* written to several *churches*, which plainly prove, that there were *congregations of Christians* in *Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse, Thessalonica, Philippi, Laodicea* (p), *Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia* (q), *Crete* (r), *Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia*, and *Bithynia* (s), and many other places; insomuch that one of the *apostles* could say, that *Christ had so wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient* not only in word or profession, but, in deed too, that from *Jerusalem, even round about unto Illyricum* he had fully preached the gospel of *Christ* (t), or as the word imports, had accomplished the purposes of it. And there is a great deal of reason, both from the nature of the thing, and from the testimony of *ancient history*, to believe, that others of the *apostles* had considerable success elsewhere: so that *Paul* might with reason apply to them and their doctrine, what is originally spoken of the luminaries of heaven and the instruction they communicate, *Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world* (u).

So great was the number of those who were profelyted to *Christianity* by the preaching of the *apostles*: and we have all imaginable reason to believe, that there were none of all these *profelytes*, but what were fully persuaded of the *truth* of the testimony they bore; for otherwise no imaginable reason can be given for their entering themselves into such a profession. The *apostles* had no secular *terrors* to affright them, no secular *rewards* to bribe them, no dazzling *eloquence* to enchant them (w): on the contrary, all these were in a powerful manner pleading against the *apostles*: yet their testimony was received, and their *new converts* were so thoroughly satisfied with the evidence which they gave them of their mission, that they encountered great *persecutions*, and chearfully ventured estate, liberty and life itself, on the truth of the *facts* they asserted; as

(p) Col. iv. 16. (q) Rev. ii. and iii. (r) Tit. i. 5. (s) 1 Pet. i. 1. (t) Rom. xv. 18, 19. (u) Compare Rom. x. 18. and Psal. xix. 4. (w) 1 Cor. i. 17, ii. 1, 4, 13. 2 Cor. x. 10. xi. 6.

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plainly appears from many passages in the *epistles*, which none can think the *apostles* would ever have writ, if these *first Christians* had not been in a *persecuted condition* (x).

Nor will it signify any thing to object, that most of these *converts* were persons of a low rank, and ordinary education, who therefore might be more easily imposed upon than others : for (not to mention *Sergius Paulus Dionysius the Areopagite*, or the domestics of *Cæsar's* household, with others of superior stations in life,) it is sufficient to remind you, that, as I have largely shewn, the *apostles* did not put their cause on the issue of *laboured arguments*, in which the *populace* might quickly have been entangled and lost, but on such *plain facts*, as they might judge of as easily and surely, as any others ; indeed, on what they themselves saw, and in part too, on what they felt.

Now I apprehend, this might be sufficient to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. You have seen, that as there is no reason to believe, that the *apostles*, who certainly *knew* the truth, would have *attempted* a fraud of this kind ;—so if they *had* attempted it, they could not possibly have *succeeded* ;---nevertheless they *did* *succeed* in a very remarkable manner ;---whence it plainly follows, that *what they testified was true*.

And now then, after this, the reasonableness of receiving the *gospel*, on admitting the *truth* of what they testified concerning *Christ*, is an easy consequence.---Yet some things are to be offered under *this head*, which are of great weight, and would not so conveniently have fallen under any of the *former* : and some considerable *additional evidence* to the *truth of Christianity*.

(x) Rom. viii. 36. 1 Cor. iv. 11,---13. xv. 29,---32. 2 Cor. i. 8, 9. iv. 8,---11. xvi. 4, 5, 9. xi. 23,---27. Gal. vi. 17. Phil. i. 28,---30. 1 Theff. i. 6. ii. 14,---15. 2 Theff. i. 4,---7. 2 Tim. i. 8. ii. 3, 9, 12, 13. iii. 11, 12. Heb. x. 32,---34. Jam. ii. 6. v. 10, 11. 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20. iii. 14,---17. iv. 1, 12,---16. Rev. ii. 10, 13.

nity arises, from what has happened in the world, since its first propagation. And therefore I chuse rather to make a *distinct discourse* on these, with the *improvement* of the whole, than to throw together the hints of them, in so hasty a manner as I must do, should I attempt to dispatch the subject in *this discourse*, the just limits of which I have already transgressed, lest the great chain of the argument should be broken.

Now I apprehend, this might be sufficient to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. You have seen that as there is no reason to believe that the apostles who certainly knew the truth, would have attempted a trial of this kind, — is it they had attempted it, they could not possibly have succeeded; — nevertheless they did succeed in a very remarkable manner; — whence it plainly follows, that what they testified was true. And now that, after this, the reasonableness of receiving the gospel, by admitting the truth of what they testified concerning it, is an easy consequence. — DIS-
These things are to be offered under the first, second, and of great weight, and would not so conveniently have fallen under any of the former: and some considerable additional evidence to the truth of Christianity.

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DISCOURSE XIX.

Additional Evidences of Christianity,
and Reflections on the whole.

[DODDRIDGE.]

2 PET. i. 16.

—We have not followed cunningly devised Fables.—

AS I had before proved the *books* of the *New Testament* to be *genuine*, I proceeded in my *last discourse*, to argue from thence the *certain truth* of the *Christian revelation*; and we have made some considerable progress in the argument.

The matter in short stands thus.---The *authors* of the *New Testament* certainly *knew*, whether the *facts* they asserted were true, or false; so that they could not *themselves be deceived*:---Neither can we think they *would attempt to deceive others*, since they appear by their manner of writing, to have been persons of great integrity and goodness;---and it is likewise evident, they could have *no temptation* to attempt a fraud of this nature:---However, if they *had attempted it*, we cannot imagine they *could have gained credit* in the world, if the *facts* they asserted had not been *true*:---Nevertheless they *did gain credit* in a very remarkable manner; from whence it plainly follows, that *those facts were true*.---Now I am to shew farther, to complete the *proof* of our grand proposition,

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6. "That admitting the *facts* which they testified concerning *Christ* to be *true*, then it was reasonable for their *contemporaries*, and is reasonable for *us*, to receive the *gospel* which they have transmitted to us, as a *divine revelation*."

The great thing they asserted was, *that Jesus was the Christ*, and that he was proved to be so,---by *prophecies* accomplished in him,---and by *miracles* wrought by him, and by others in his name. Let us attend to each of these, and I am persuaded we shall find them no contemptible arguments; but must be forced to acknowledge, that the *premises* being established, the *conclusion* most easily and necessarily follows: And this conclusion, *that Jesus is the Christ*, taken in all its extent, is an *abstract* of the *gospel revelation*, and therefore is sometimes put for *the whole of it* (a).

The *apostles*, especially when disputing with the *Jews*, did frequently argue from "the *prophecies* of the *Old Testament*;" in which, they say, many things were expressly *foretold*, which were most literally and exactly *fulfilled* in *Jesus of Nazareth* (b). Now, greatly to the evidence, confirmation, and advantage of *Christianity*, so it is, that *these prophecies* are to this day extant in their *original language*; and this, in the hands of a people, most implacably averse to the *gospel*: So that an attentive reader may still, in a great measure, satisfy himself, as to the validity of the argument drawn from them.

On searching these ancient and important *records*, we find, not only in the general, that God intended to raise up for his people an illustrious *deliverer*, who, amongst other glorious titles, is sometimes called *the*

(a) Act viii. 37. ix. 22. xvii. 3. xviii. 5. I John ii. 22. v. 1.

(b) Acts ii. 25,---31. iii. 18,---25. vii. 37. viii. 35. x. 43. xiii. 23, 27, 32,---37. 40, 41. xvii. 2, 3. xxvi. 22, 23, 27, xxviii. 23.

Messiah, or the anointed One (c): But we are more particularly told, that this great event should happen, before the government ceased in the tribe of Judah (d); while the second temple was standing (e); and a little before its destruction, about 490 years after a command given to rebuild Jerusalem (f); which was probably issued out in the seventh year of *Artaxerxes Longimanus*, or at least within a few years before, or after it. It is predicted, that he should be the seed of Abraham (g), born of a virgin, of the house of David (h), in the town of *Bethlehem* (i); that he should be anointed with an extraordinary effusion of the divine spirit (k), in virtue of which, he should not only be a perfect and illustrious example of universal holiness and goodness (l), but should also perform many extraordinary and beneficial miracles (m); nevertheless, that, for want of external pomp and splendour, he should be rejected and insulted by the Jews (n), and at length be cut off and slain by them (o). It is added, that he should arise from the dead before his body should be corrupted in the grave (p); and should be received up to heaven, and there seated at the right hand of God (q); from whence he should in a wonderful manner pour out his spirit on his followers (r); in consequence of which, though the body of the Jewish people perished in their obstinate opposition to him (s), yet, the Gentiles should be brought to the knowledge of the true God (t), and a kingdom established amongst them, which from small beginnings should spread itself to the ends of the earth, and continue to the remotest ages (u).

- (c) Dan. ix. 25, 26. Psal. ii. 2. (d) Gen. xlix. 10.
 (e) Hag. ii. 7, 9. (f) Dan. ix. 25, — 27. (g) Gen. xii. 3.
 xviii. 18. xxii. 18. (h) Isai. vii. 14. xi. 1. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.
 (i) Mic. v. 2. (k) Isai. xlii. 1. lxi. 1. (l) Isai. xlii. 1, 4. liii. 9.
 Psal. xlv. 7. (m) Isai. xxxv. 5, 6. (n) Isai. liii. 2, — 4. (o) Isai.
 liii. 7, — 9. Dan. ix. 26. (p) Psal. xvi. 9, 10. Isai. xxvi. 19.
 liii. 10, — 12. (q) Psal. xvi. 11. cx. 1. (r) Joel ii. 28, 29.
 (s) Isai. vi. 9, 10. xxix. 10. xlix. 4, 5. liii. 1. lxxv. 2. (t) Psal.
 ii. 8. xxii. 27. lxxxvi. 9. Isai. ii. 2, 3. xi. 10. xlii. 1, 4, 6, 7.
 xlv. 22. xlix. 6, — 12. Mal. i. 11. (u) Dan. ii. 44. vii. 13, 14, 27.

Besides *these* most material *circumstances*, there were several *others* relating to him, which were either expressly *foretold*, or at least *hinted at*; all which, with those already mentioned, had so evident an *accomplishment* in *Jesus*, (allowing the *truth* of the *facts* which the *apostles* testified concerning him), that we have no reason to wonder, that *they* should *receive the word with all readiness*, who *searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so predicted there*, as the *apostles* affirmed (*w*). For I am persuaded, that no wise and religious person could imagine, that God would permit an *impostor* to arise, in whom so great a variety of *predictions*, delivered by so many different persons, and in so many distant ages, should have an *exact accomplishment*.

When the *apostles* were preaching to *Heathens*, it is indeed true, that they generally waved the argument from *prophecy*, because *they* were not so capable judges of it: But then they insist on another, which might as soon captivate their belief, and as justly vindicate it, I mean, “the *miracles* performed by *Christ*, and “those commissioned and influenced by him.” Many of these were of such a nature, as not to admit of any artifice or deceit: Especially, that most signal one of *his resurrection from the dead*, which I may call a *miracle* performed by, as well as *upon Christ*; because he so expressly declares, that he had himself a *power to resume his life* at pleasure (*x*). The *apostles* well knew, *this* was a *fact* of such a nature, that they who believed this, would never doubt of the rest: They therefore often single *this* out, and lay the whole stress of their cause upon it (*y*). *This* they proved to be *true*, by their own *testimony miraculously confirmed*; and in proving *this*, they established *Christianity* on an impregnable rock. For I may safely refer it to any of you

(*w*) Acts xvii. 11. (*x*) John x. 18. (*y*) Acts ii. 24,---32. iii. 15. iv. 10. v. 30, 32. x. 40, 41. xiii. 30,---39. xvii. 31. xxvi. 23. Rom. x. 9. 1 Cor. xv. 3,---8, 12,---22.

to judge, whether it is an imaginable thing, that God should raise the dead body of an impostor; especially when he had solemnly appealed to such a resurrection, as the grand proof of his mission, and had expressly fixed the very day on which it was to happen (z).

I persuade myself you are convinced by all this, that they, who on the apostles testimony believed, that the prophecies of the Old Testament were accomplished in Jesus, and that God bore witness to him by miracles, and raised him from the dead, had abundant reason to believe, that the doctrine which Christ taught was divine, and his gospel a revelation from heaven. And if they had reason to admit this conclusion, then it is plain, that we, who have such satisfactory evidences, on the one hand, that the testimony of the apostles was credible, and on the other, that this was the substance of it, have reason also to admit this grand inference from it, and to embrace the gospel as a faithful saying, and as well worthy of all acceptance (a). This is the thing I was attempting to prove; and here I should end the argument, were it not for the confirmation it may receive from some additional considerations, which could not properly be introduced under any of the preceding Heads. I add therefore,

7. In the last place, “ that the truth of the gospel “ has received farther, and very considerable confir- “ mation, from what has happened in the world since “ it was first published.”

And here I must desire you, more particularly to consider,—on the one hand, what God has been doing to establish it;—and on the other, the methods which its enemies have been taking to destroy it.

(1) Consider “ what God has been doing to con- “ firm the gospel since its first publication?” and

(2) Matt. xxvii. 63. John ii. 19, 21. (a) 1 Tim. i. 15.

you will find it a farther evidence of its *divine original*.

I might here argue at large, from its surprising *propagation* in the world;—from the *miraculous powers*, with which not only the *apostles*, but succeeding *preachers* of the *gospel*, and other *converts*, were endowed;—from the *accomplishment* of *prophecies* recorded in the *New Testament*;—and from the *preservation* of the *Jews* as a *distinct people*, notwithstanding the various difficulties and persecutions through which they have passed.

I might particularly urge, in *confirmation* of the *truth* of *Christianity*; “the wonderful *success* with which it was attended, and the surprising *propagation* of the *gospel* in the world.”

I have before endeavoured under a *former head* to shew you, that the *gospel* met with so favourable a *reception* in the world, as evidently proved, that its *first publishers* were capable of producing such *evidence* of its *truth*, as an *imposture* could not admit. But now I carry the remark farther, and assert, that considering the circumstances of the case, it is amazing that even *truth itself*, under so many disadvantages, should have so illustrious a *triumph*; and that its wonderful success does evidently argue such an extraordinary interposition of *God* in its favour, as may justly be called a *miraculous attestation* to it.

There was not only *one of a family*, or *two of a city* taken, and brought to *Zion* (b); but so did the *Lord* hasten it in its appointed time, that a little one became a *thousand*, and a small one a *strong nation* (c). And as the *apostles themselves* were honoured with very remarkable *success*, so this divine seed was *propagated* so fast in the next age, that *Pliny* testifies, “he found the *Heathen temples* in *Achaia* almost deserted:” And *Tertullian* afterwards boasts, “that all places

(b) Jer. iii. 14.

(c) Isai. lx. 22.

“ but *those temples* were filled with *Christians*; so that
 “ were *they only* to withdraw, cities and provinces
 “ would be depopulated.” [Nor did the *gospel* only
 triumph thus within the boundaries of the *Roman em-*
pire; for long before *Tertullian* was born, *Justin Mar-*
tyr, in his *Dialogue* with *Trypho* the *Jew*, which seems
 to have been written not much above an hundred
 years after *Christ's* death, declares, “ that there was
 “ no nation of men, whether *Greeks* or *Barbarians*,
 “ not excepting those *savages*, that wandered in *clans*
 “ from one region to another, and had no fixed ha-
 “ bitation, who had not learnt to offer prayers and
 “ thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in
 “ the name of *Jesus* who was crucified.]”

Now how can we account for such a scene as this,
 but by saying, that the *hand of the Lord* was with the
first preachers of the *gospel*, and therefore such *multi-*
tudes believed, and turned unto the Lord (d) ? How had
 it been possible, that so small a *fountain* should pre-
 sently have swelled into a mighty *river*, and even
 have covered the face of the earth, had it not sprung
 from the *sanctuary* of *God*, and been rendered thus
 triumphant by his almighty arm ?

Had this *new religion*, so directly contrary to all the
 prejudices of education, been contrived to sooth men's
 vices, to assert their errors, to defend their supersti-
 tions, or to promote their secular interests, we might
 easily have accounted for its prevalence in the world.
 Had its *preachers* been very profound *philosophers*, or
 polite and fashionable *orators*, many might have been
 charmed, at least for a while, to follow them: or had
 the *princes* and potentates of the earth declared them-
 selves its patrons, and armed their legions for its de-
 fence and propagation, multitudes might have been
 terrified into the profession, tho' not a soul could by
 such means have been rationally persuaded to the be-
 lief of it. But without some such advantages as these,
 we can hardly conceive, how any *new religion* should

(d) Acts ix. 21.

so strangely prevail; even though it had crept into the world in its darkest ages, and most barbarous countries, and though it had been gradually proposed in the most artful manner, with the finest veil industriously drawn over every part, which might at first have given disgust to the beholder.

But you well know, that the very reverse of all this was the case here. You know, from the apparent constitution of *Christianity*, that the lusts and errors, the superstitions and interests of carnal men would immediately rise up against it as a most irreconcilable enemy. You know, that the learning and wit of the *Greeks*, and the *Romans*, were early employed to over-bear and ridicule it. You know, that as all the herd of *Heathen deities* were to be discarded, the *priests*, who subsisted on *that craft*, must in interest find themselves obliged to oppose it. You know, that the *princes* of the earth drew the sword against it, and armed torments and death for the destruction of its followers. And yet you see, that it triumphed over all, though published in ages, and places, of the greatest learning and refinement; and proposed, not in an ornamental and artificial manner, but with the utmost plainness; the doctrines of the *cross* being always avowed as its grand fundamentals, though so notorious a *stumbling-block* both to *Jews* and *Gentiles* (e); [and the absolute necessity, not only of embracing *Christianity*, but also of renouncing all *idol worship*, being insisted on immediately and in the strongest terms, though it must make the *gospel* appear the most singular and unfociable religion that had ever been taught in the world.]

Had one of the wits, or politicians of these ages, seen the *apostles*, and a few other plain men, who had been educated amongst the lowest of the people, as most of the *first teachers* of *Christianity* were, going out armed with nothing but faith, truth, and goodness, to encounter the power of *princes*, the bigotry of

(e) 1 Cor. i. 23.

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priests, the learning of *philosophers*, the rage of the *populace*, and the prejudices of *all*; how would he have derided the attempt, and said with *Sanballat*, *What will these feeble Jews do (f) ?* But had he seen the event, surely he must have owned, with the *Egyptian magi*, in a far less illustrious miracle, that it was *the finger of God (g)*; and might justly have fallen on *his face*, even amongst those whom he had insulted, with an humble acknowledgment *that God was in them of a truth (h)*.

I might here farther urge, “ those *miracles*, which “ were wrought in *confirmation* of the *Christian doctrine*, for a considerable time after the death of the “ *apostles*.”

The most signal, and best attested of these, was the *dispossession* of *devils*; whom *God* seems to have permitted to rage with an unusual violence about those times, that *his son's triumph* over them might be so much the more remarkable, and that *the old serpent* might be *taken in his own craftiness*. I doubt not, but many of you have heard, that more than *two hundred years* after the death of *Christ*, some of the most celebrated *defenders* of the *gospel*, which the church has in any age produced, I mean *Tertullian*, and *Minutius Felix*, do not only challenge any of their *Heathen* enemies and persecutors, to bring them a *Demoniack*, engaging, at the hazard of their lives, to oblige the evil spirit, in the name, and by the authority of *Christ*, to quit his possession; but do also appeal to it, as a *fact* publicly known, that those who were agitated by such spirits, stood terrified, and amazed in the presence of a *Christian*, and that their pretended *gods* were compelled then to confess themselves *devils*.

I wave the *testimonies* of some *later writers* of the *Christian church*, lest the credulity of their temper,

(f) Neh. iv. 2.

(g) Exod. viii. 19.

(h) 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

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joined with the circumstances attending some of the *facts* they record, should furnish out objections against their testimony; though I think we cannot, without great injustice to the character of the learned and pious *Augustin*, suspect the truth of some amazing *facts* of this kind, which he has attested, as of his own personal and certain knowledge.

Nor must I on this occasion forget to mention “the *accomplishment* of several *prophecies*, recorded in “the *New Testament*,” as a farther *confirmation* given by God to the *gospel*.

The most eminent and signal instance under this head, is that of *our Lord's prediction* concerning the *destruction* of *Jerusalem*, as it is recorded by *St. Matthew* in his *twenty-fourth chapter*. The tragical history of it is most circumstantially described by *Josephus*, a *Jewish priest*, who was an eye-witness of it; and the description he has given of this sad calamity, so exactly corresponds to the *prophecy*, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it had been written by a *Christian* on purpose to illustrate it: [And one can never enough admire that series of amazing providences, by which the author was preserved from most eminent danger; that he might leave us that invaluable treasure which his writings contain.

We have no need of farther evidence, than we find in him, of the exact *accomplishment* of what was *prophefied* concerning the *destruction* of *Jerusalem*: but *our Lord* had also *foretold* the long continued *desolation* of their *temple* (i); and I cannot forbear reminding you of the awful sanction which was given to that part of the *prediction*: for it is well known, that a *Heathen historian* has assured us, that when *Julian the apostate*, in deliberate contempt of that *prediction*, solemnly and resolutely undertook to rebuild it, his impious

(i) Matt. xxiii. 38. xxiv. 2.

design was miraculously frustrated again and again, and the workmen consumed by *globes of fire*, which broke out from the foundations.]

The *prediction* of *St. Paul* concerning the *man of sin*, and the *apostacy of the latter times* (k), is also well worthy of our remark. And though a great deal of the *book of Revelation* be still concealed under a dark veil; yet the division of the *Roman empire* into *ten kingdoms*, the usurpation, persecution and idolatry of the *Romish church*, and the long duration of the *papal power*, with several other extraordinary events, which no human prudence could have foreseen, and [which have happened long since the publication of that book, are so clearly foretold there, that I cannot but look on that part of scripture as an invaluable treasure; and think it not at all improbable, that the more visible *accomplishment* of some of its other *prophecies* may be a great means of reviving the *Christian cause*, which is at present so much on the decline.

“ The *preservation* of the *Jews* as a *distinct people*,” is another particular under this head, which well deserves our attentive regard.

’Tis plain they are vastly numerous, notwithstanding all the slaughter and destruction of this people, in former, and in latter ages. They are dispersed in various most distant nations, and particularly in these parts of the world where *Christianity* is professed: and though they are exposed to great hatred and contempt, on account of their different faith, and in most places subjected to civil incapacities, if not to unchristian severities; yet they are still most obstinately tenacious of their religion: which is the more wonderful, as *their fathers* were so prone to apostatize from it; and as most of them seem to be utter strangers, either to piety, or humanity, and pour the greatest contempt on the *moral precepts* of their own

(k) 2 Thess. ii. 3---12. 1 Tim. iv. 1---3.

law, while they are so attached to the *ceremonial institution* of it, troublesome and inconvenient as they are. Now seriously reflect, what an evident *band of providence* is here; that by their dispersion, preservation, and adherence to their religion, it should come to pass, that *Christians* should daily see the *accomplishment* of many remarkable *prophecies* concerning this people; and that we should always have amongst us such a croud of unexceptionable witnesses to the truth of those ancient *Hebrew records*, on which so much of the evidence of the *gospel* depends: *records*, which are many of them so full to the purpose for which we alledge them, that (as a celebrated writer very well observes,) “Had the whole body of the *Jewish nation* been converted to *Christianity*, men would “certainly have thought, they had been forged by “*Christians*, and have looked upon them, with the “prophecies of the *Sybils*, as made many years after “the events they pretend to foretell.” And to add no more here, the *preservation* of the *Jews* as a *distinct people* evidently leaves room for the *accomplishment* of those *Old and New Testament promises* (1), which relate to their *national conversion and restoration*; whereas that would be impossible in itself, or at least impossible to be known, if they were promiscuously blended with other people. On the whole, it is such a scene in the conduct of *providence*, as I am well assured cannot be paralleled in the history of any other nation on earth, and affords a most obvious and important argument in favour of the *gospel*.

Thus has *Christianity* been farther *confirmed*, since its first publication, by what *God* has done to *establish* it. It only remains, that we consider,

(1) Deut. xxx. 3--5. Isai. xxvii. 12, 13. xlv. 17. xlix. 6. liv. lix. 20, 21. lx. lxi. lxii. lxv. lxvii. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. xxx. 8--24. xxxi. 31--40. l. 4. 5. Ezek. xi. 17--20. xx. 34--44. xxxiv. 11--31. xxxvi. 21--38. xxxvii. 21, 28. Hos. i. 10, 11. ii. 14--23. iii. 4, 5. Joel iii. Amos ix. 11--15. Obad. ver. 17--21. Mic. vii. 14--20. Zech. vii. 7--23. x. 6--12. xii. 10. xiv. 9--21. Rom. xi. 25--27. 2 Cor. iii. 16.

(2.) What confirmation it receives, "from the methods which its enemies have taken to destroy it."

And these have generally been, either *persecution*, or *falsehood*, or *cavilling* at some particulars in the *revelation*, without entering into the grand argument on which it is built, and fairly debating what is offered in its defence. Now who would not think the better of a cause, for being thus attacked?

At first you know, that the *professors*, and especially the *preachers* of the *gospel*, were severely *persecuted*. In every city bonds and imprisonments awaited them (*m*). As soon as ever the *apostles* began to preach *Jesus* and his *resurrection*, the *Jewish* rulers laid hold on them, and having confined and scourged them, strictly prohibited their *speaking any more in that name* (*n*). A little while after, *Stephen* was murder'd (*o*); and afterwards *James* (*p*), and some other of the *apostles*. Now certainly such a conduct did evidently shew a consciousness, that they were not able to answer the *apostles*, and to support their own cause by the fair methods of reason and argument; to which, so far as the history informs us, they made no pretence; but attempted to bear them down by dint of authority, and to silence them by brutal force.

The time would fail me, should I attempt particularly to shew, how these unrighteous methods were pursued in succeeding ages, and distant countries. The savage cruelties of *Nero* to these innocent and holy men were such, as raised the pity even of their enemies: yet this was one of the least extensive and destructive of the *ten* general *persecutions*, which arose in the *Roman* empire, besides several others in the neighbouring countries, of which *ecclesiastical history* informs us.

(*m*) Acts xx. 23. (*n*) Acts iv. 17. v. 40. (*o*) Acts vii. 58.
(*p*) Acts xii. 2.

These

These early *enemies* of the *gospel* added *falsehood* and *slander* to their inhumanities. They endeavoured to murder the reputations of the *Christians*, as well as their persons, and were not ashamed [to represent them as *haters of the whole human species*, for no imaginable reason, but because they would not associate themselves in their idolatrous worship, but with regard to charity and truth, were strongly bearing their testimony against it:] Nay, they charged them with *human sacrifices*, *incest*, *idolatry*, and all the *crimes*, for which themselves and their foolish *Gods* were indeed justly detestable; but from which the *Christians* knew how to vindicate themselves, highly to their own honour, and to the everlasting reproach of these malignant and pestilent accusers: and they have not failed to do it in many noble *apologies*, which through the divine providence are transmitted to us, and are incomparably the most valuable of any ancient uninspired writings.

Such were the infamous and scandalous methods, by which the *gospel* was opposed in the earliest ages of the church; and I cannot forbear adding, "that the measures more lately taken to subvert it, *especially amongst ourselves*, seem to me rather to reflect a glory upon it." Its unhappy *enemies* have been told again and again, that we put the proof of it on plain *fact*. They themselves do not, and cannot deny, that it prevailed early in the world, as we have shewn at large. There must have been some man, or body of men, who first introduced it: They generally confess, that *Christ* and his *apostles* were the persons: and these *apostles* (on whose *testimony* what we know of *Christ* chiefly depends) must have been *enthusiasts* or *impostors*, if their testimony was false. Now which of these schemes will the unbeliever take? It seems, that the *Deists* of the present age fix on neither, as being secretly conscious they can support neither; but they content themselves with *cavilling* at some circumstances attending the *revelation*, without daring to encounter its grand evidence; *i. e.* they have been laboriously attempting

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tempting to prove it "to be improbable, or absurd, "to suppose that to have been, which nevertheless "plainly appears to have been fact." One most weakly and sophistically pretends to prove, in defiance of the common sense of mankind, that the *light of nature* is a *perfect rule*, and therefore that all *revelation* is needless, and indeed impossible. Another disguises the *miracles of Christ* by false and foolish representations of them, and then sets himself to ridicule them as *idle tales*. And a third takes a great deal of fruitless pains to shew that some *prophecies* referred to in the *New Testament* are capable of another sense, different from that in which the *Apostles* have taken them. These things have been set in a very artful and fallacious light by persons, whose names will be perhaps transmitted to posterity, with the infamous glory of having been leaders in the cause of *infidelity*; but not a man of them undertakes directly to answer, what has been said to ascertain the grand *fact*. Nay, they generally take no more notice of the positive *evidence*, by which it is even *demonstrated*, than if they had never heard it proposed; though they *cavil* at incidental passages in those books, in which it is most clearly stated. And as for what they have urged, tho' perhaps some, who were before weary of *Christianity*, may have taken occasion from their writings to reject it; and others for want of consulting the answers to them, may have been unwarily insnared; yet the examination of these points has been greatly for the honour and vindication of the *truth*, which seems on this occasion to have been set in a clearer and stronger light than ever, at least in these later ages.

The cause of *Christianity* has greatly gained by *debate*, and the *gospel* comes like *fine gold out of the furnace*, which the more it is tried, the more it is approved. I own, the *Defenders* of the *gospel* have appeared with very different degrees of ability for the work; nor could it be otherwise amongst such numbers of them: but on the whole, though the *patrons* of *infidelity*

delity have been masters of some wit, humour, and address, as well as of a moderate share of learning, and generally much more than a moderate share of assurance; yet so great is the force of *truth*, that (unless we may except those writers, who have unhappily called for the aid of the civil magistrate in the controversy,) I cannot recollect, that I have seen any *defence* of the *gospel*, which has not, on the whole, been sufficient to establish it, notwithstanding all the sophistical arguments of its most subtile *antagonists*.

[This is an observation, which is continually gaining new strength, as *new assaults* are made upon the *gospel*. And I cannot forbear saying that as if it were by a kind of *judicial infatuation*, some who have distinguished themselves in the wretched cause of *infidelity*, have been permitted to fall into such gross *misrepresentations*, such senseless *inconsistencies*, and such palpable *falsehoods*, and in a word, into such a various and malignant *superfluity of naughtiness*; that to a wise and pious mind they must appear like those *venomous creatures*, which are said to carry an antidote in their bowels against their own poison. A virtuous and well bred *deist* must turn away from some *modern pieces* of this kind with scorn and abhorrence; and a *Christian* might almost be tempted to wish, that the *books*, with all their scandals about them, might be transmitted to posterity, lest when they come to live, like the writings of some of the *ancient heathens*, only in those of their learned and pious *answerers*, it should hardly be credited, that ever the *enemies* of the *gospel* in such an enlightened age should be capable of so much impiety and folly.]

Thus I have given you a brief view of the *chief arguments* in proof of *Christianity*; and the sum of the whole is this.

The *gospel* is *probable in theory*; as considering the *nature of God*, and the *circumstances of mankind*, there was reason to hope a *revelation* might be given; and if

if any were given, we should naturally apprehend its *internal evidence* would be such as that of the *gospel* is, and its *external* such, as it is said to be. But it is also *true in fact*; for *Christianity* was *early professed*, as it was first *introduced* by *Jesus of Nazareth*, whose life and doctrines were *published* by his immediate *attendants*; whose *books* are preserved still in their *original* language, and in the main are faithfully *translated* into our own: so that the *Books* of the *New Testament* now in your hands may be depended upon, as *written by the persons* whose names they bear. And admitting this, the *truth* of the *gospel* follows by a train of very easy consequences; for the *authors* certainly *knew the truth* of the *facts* they relate; and considering what appears of their *character* and *circumstances*, we can never believe they *would have attempted* to deceive us; or if they *had*, they could not have *gained credit* in the world; yet they *did gain it* in a remarkable manner; therefore the *facts* they attested are *true*: and the *truth* of the *gospel* evidently follows from the *certainty* of those *facts*, and is much *confirmed* by what *has happened* in the world since the first publication of it.

I shall conclude what I have to say on this subject, with a few words by way of *reflection*.

1. Let us gratefully acknowledge the divine goodness, in favouring us with so excellent a *revelation*, and confirming it to us by such an *ample evidence*.

We should be daily adoring the God of nature, for lighting up the *sun*, that glorious, though imperfect image of his own unapproachable lustre; and appointing it to gild the earth with its various rays, to cheer us with its benign influences, and to guide and direct us, in our journeys, and our labours. But how incomparably more valuable is that *day-spring from on high* which *has visited us*, that *sun of righteousness*, which is *risen upon us*, to give light to them that sit in darkness,

ness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace (q)? Oh Christians, (for I now address myself to you, whose eyes are so happy as indeed to see, and your ears as to hear (r),) what reason have you for daily and hourly praise! When your minds are delighted with contemplating the riches of *gospel grace*, when you view with wonder and joy the harmonious contrivance of our redemption, when you feel the burden of your guilt removed, the freedom of your address to the throne of grace encouraged, and see the prospect of a fair inheritance of eternal glory opening upon you; then in the pleasing transport of your souls, borrow the joyful anthem of the *psalmist*, and say, with the humblest gratitude and self-resignation; *God is the Lord, who hath given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar (s)*, Adore God, who first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that by the discoveries of his word, and the operations of his spirit, he has shined in your hearts, to give you the knowledge of his glory, as reflected from the face of his son (t). Let us all adore him, that this revelation hath reached us, who live in an age and country so distant from that in which it first appeared; while there are to this day, not only dark corners, but regions of the earth, which are full of the habitations of idolatry and cruelty (u).

Let me here peculiarly address myself to those, whose education and circumstances of life have given them opportunities of a fuller enquiry, into the state of those ancient or modern nations, that have been left merely to the light of unassisted reason; even to you, sirs, who are acquainted with the history of their Gods, the rites of their priests, the tales, and even the hymns of their poets, (those beautiful trifles;) nay, I will add, the reasonings of their sagest philosophers, all the precarious, and all the erroneous things they have said, where religion and immortality are concerned. I have

(q) Mal. iv. 2. Luke i. 78, 79. (r) Matt. xiii. 16. (s) Psal. xxviii. 27. (t) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (u) Psal. lxxiv. 20.

sometimes thought, that *God* gave to some of the most celebrated *Pagan writers* that uncommon share of genius and eloquence, that they might, as it were, by their art embalm the monsters of antiquity; that so succeeding ages might see, in a more affecting view than we could otherwise have done, how weak the human mind is in its best estate, and the need, which the greatest, as well as the meanest of mankind have, of being taught by a *revelation* from above. Permit me to remind you, that while you are daily conversing with such monuments as these, (as I know some of you are), and are also surveying the *evidences of Christianity*, in a larger, and more distinct view, than it was proper for me here to propose them, you are under peculiar obligations, to be very *thankful* for the *gospel* yourselves, as well as to *compassionate* the case of those, to whom it has never been offered, or by whom it is slighted. And this leads me to another reflection;

2. What reason have we to *pity* those, who *reject* this glorious *gospel*, even when they have opportunities of enquiring into its clearest *evidences*.

Such undoubtedly there are in our own age and nation; and surely we should sometimes bestow a compassionate thought upon them, and lift up an humble prayer for them; *if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are now led captive by him at his pleasure (w)*. We should pity *Heathens*, and *Mahometans*, under their darkness and errors; but how much more deplorable is the case of *these*, who, though they dwell in *Emmanuel's land*, and in *the valley of vision*, turn it into *the valley of the shadow of death*, by closing their eyes against so bright a lustre, and *stopping their ears* against *the voice of the charmer (x)*? They are indeed in their own conceit *the only people, and wisdom will die with*

(w) 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

(x) Psal. lviii. 4, 5.

them (y); so that to be sure, they will scorn our *pity*: but who can forbear it? Is there a more melancholy thought than this, that the *Son of God* should have done so much to introduce and establish the *gospel*, and his *spirit* so much to perpetuate and increase its *evidence*, and that after all, it should be contemptuously despised, even by creatures who are perishing without it? That the blessed *Jesus*, instead of being received with open arms as the great deliverer, should either be treated as an *empty name*: or if acknowledged to be a *real person*, should then be represented as a visionary *enthusiast*, or a wicked *impostor*; for there is no other alternative? And this, not only, though I believe, most frequently, by men of profligate and abandoned lives, but sometimes by persons of external morality and decency, of great humanity and sweetness of temper, (for such I know are to be found amongst them), as well as men of wit and genius, of politeness and learning, of human prudence and experience in affairs. I may also add, that it is the case of some, who were the *children of pious parents*, who were trained up in religious exercises, who once discovered serious impressions, and gave very encouraging hopes. Alas, whither are they *fallen*! and whither have we reason to fear, they will at length *fall*! How shall we shelter those, that were *once our brethren*, that are perhaps *still our friends*, from the awful sentence, which the *gospel* denounces against all that reject it, without any exception? As to the wretches, that add *insult* and *derision* to their *infidelity*, I tremble to think of that load of guilt, which they are bringing on themselves, and how near they approach to the *unpardonable sin*, if they have not already committed it. For the rest, who behave in a more modest and sober manner, it will, no doubt, be a very difficult task to convince them; and so much the rather, as some of them, by too easy a transition, have renounced many of the most important principles of *natural religion*, nay, I might

(y) Job xii. 2.

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add, even the whole of it, together with the *Christian revelation*. But the influences of divine grace are almighty ; let us recommend them to these, and omit no other proper method, either of recovering those who are already seduced, or at least of securing those who are not yet infected, but may be (as most of the youth are, especially in the most populous places,) in eminent danger of the contagion, To this end let me add,

3. How reasonable is it, that *Christians* should form a familiar acquaintance with the great *evidences* of our common faith !

It is what we so apparently owe to the honour of God, to the interest of *Christ*, to the peace of our own souls, and the edification of others, that I hope, I need not urge it at large : especially considering what was said in the *introduction* to these discourses. In consequence of all, let it be your care to make the *evidences of Christianity* the subject of your serious reflections, and of your frequent converse : especially, study your *Bibles*, where there are such marks of *truth* and *divinity* to be found, that I believe, few that have familiarly know them, and have had a relish for them, were ever brought to *make shipwreck* of the *faith* as it is in *Jesus*. Above all, let it be your care to act on the rules which are here laid down ; and then, you will find your *faith* growing in a happy proportion, and will experience the truth of our Saviour's declaration, that *if any man will* resolutely and faithfully *do his will, he shall know of the Christian doctrine, whether it be of God* (z). I verily believe, it is the purity of its precepts, which lies at the bottom of most men's opposition to it ; or a natural pride of heart, which gives them an aversion to so humbling a scheme ; or a fond affectation of seeming wiser than others, in rejecting what most of their

(z) John vii. 17.

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neighbours

neighbours do at least profess to believe. When these unhappy prejudices and conceptions are by divine grace conquered and rooted out, the *evidence of truth* will daily appear with an increasing lustre; as the light of the *sun* does, to an eye recovering from a film, with which it had been overgrown, and which before had veiled it with midnight in the midst of noon. Once more,

4. How solicitous should we be to *embrace* and *obey* that *gospel*, which comes attended with such *abundant evidences*!

I may undoubtedly address myself to most of you, my friends, and say, as *Paul* did to *king Agrippa*, *Believest thou the prophets* (a), and I may add, *the evangelists, and the apostles*? Yes, *I know that you believe them*; yet let me intreat and charge you, not to rest here; but attentively to examine, how far your hearts are affected, and your lives regulated by such a belief. The *Christian revelation* is a practical thing; and it is *heard*, it is *believed*, it is *professed*, and even *defended in vain*, if it be not *obeyed*. Therefore do we so frequently read of *obeying the truth*, and *obeying the gospel*, as a matter of so great importance (b).

In this *gospel*, the *wrath of God* is revealed from *heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*; but it is revealed with redoubted terror against that audacious sinner, *who holds the truth in unrighteousness* (c). In this *gospel*, the *Lord Jesus Christ* is exalted, both as a *prince*, and a *Saviour* (d); and it is not with impunity, that the impenitent rebel can reject his yoke, and trample on his blood: for *if he that despised Moses's law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment*, than even a capital execution,

(a) Acts xxvi. 27.

(b) Rom. ii. 8. vi. 17. Gal. iii. 1.

2 Theff. i. 8.

1 Pet. i. 22. iv. 17.

(c) Rom. i. 18.

(d) Acts

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must they be thought worthy, who have poured contempt on such a sovereign, and on such a redeemer (e) ?

Oh let it be most seriously and frequently recollected, that *this gospel* is the *touch-stone*, by which you are another day to be tried : the *balance*, in which an impartial judge will weigh you ; and must on the whole prove your everlasting *triumph*, or your everlasting *torment*. The blessed *God* did not introduce it with such solemn notice, such high expectation, such pompous miracles, such awful sanctions, that men might reject, or dishonour it, at pleasure : but it will certainly be found, to the greatest, and the meanest, of those that hear it, a *saviour of life unto life*, or a *saviour of death unto death* (f).

Let it therefore be your immediate care, to enquire, which of these it is like to prove to your souls ; since it is so far from being a *vain thing*, that it is really *your very life* (g). If it has hitherto been *despised*, and that blessed *Redeemer*, in whom it so apparently centers, has been *neglected* ; remember, that all which has been said in confirmation of its *truth*, does but in effect prove, that the *hand writing* of *God* himself is set to the sentence of your eternal condemnation. Oh therefore allow not yourselves a moment's rest, till you have with humble submission applied to his throne, while yet there is *hope* that it may be reversed.

And as for you, my brethren, who have *received Christ Jesus the Lord*, be exhorted to *walk in him* (h) ; since it is the design of his *gospel* to *teach us*, to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and to *live soberly, righteously, and godly* (i) ; and this, not only as you have so comfortable an assurance, that *your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* (k), but as it will be, on the whole, the most effectual method you can take in your respective stations to promote the *gospel*. If you

(e) Heb. x. 28, 29.

(f) 2 Cor. ii. 16.

(g) Deut. xxxii.

(h) Col. ii. 6.

(i) Tit. ii. 12.

(k) 1 Cor. xv. 58.

indeed

indeed honour it and love it, and desire it may be propagated in the world, let it be your care, not only to *defend it* by your tongues, but to *adorn it* by your lives; and in the words of that great champion in this sacred cause, *be blameless and harmless, the children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining amongst them as lights in the world, and so holding forth the word of life* (l); and perhaps it may serve, not only to entertain their eyes with wonder and glory, but to *guide their feet into the way of peace*, and may engage them also to join with you in *glorifying your father which is in heaven* (m). Amen!

(l) Phil. ii. 15, 16.

(m) Matt. v. 6.

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DISCOURSE XX.

The Situation of the World at the Time
of Christ's appearance,

[ROBERTSON.]

COLOSS. i. 26.

*Even the Mystery, which hath been hid from Ages,
and Generations, but now is made manifest to
his Saints.*

DIS. **T**H E R E is no employment more delightful to a devout mind, than the contemplation of the divine wisdom, in the government of this world. The civil history of mankind opens a wide field for this pious exercise. Careful observers may often, by the light of reason, form probable conjectures with regard to the plan of God's providence, and can discover a skilful hand, directing the revolutions of human affairs, and compassing the best ends, by the most effectual and surprising means : but sacred history, by drawing aside that veil which covers the councils of the Almighty, lays open his designs to the view of his creatures ; and we can trace the steps which he taketh towards them, with more certainty, and greater pleasure. The facts which inspired writers relate, are no less instructive, than the doctrines which they teach. The latter inform us, that God
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is powerful, and wise, and good; the former discover these perfections brought forth into action, and confirm speculative opinions, by real and striking examples.

The publication and establishment of Christianity in the world, is a remarkable event of this kind, and contributes greatly to illustrate and magnify the divine power and wisdom. From beginnings the most inconsiderable, and by instruments the most unlikely, the Almighty, with incredible facility, raised that glorious fabric of his church, which hitherto hath withstood all the rage of his enemies, and *the gates of hell, we believe, shall not prevail against it* *. According to our Saviour's beautiful image, *the least of all seeds grew up, and waxed a great tree, and spread out its branches, and filled the earth* †. The hand of God sheltered this feeble plant from the storm, and by his care it was reared, and cultivated, and brought to maturity. The wisdom and power of men united to oppose the doctrine of God: but it confounded the one, and overcame the other. Neither the bigotry of the Jews, nor the superstition of the Heathen, could resist its progress; and in vain *did Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of Israel, gather themselves together against the Lord and his anointed* ‡.

Many circumstances concurred in procuring for Christianity such a favourable reception and firm establishment in the world. Whoever reflects upon the situation of mankind in that period, will find abundant reason to admire the divine wisdom, which disposed these circumstances with so much art, and improved them with such skill and success. The text naturally leads me to consider the conduct and administration of providence, in this particular light. *The word of God, saith the apostle, the mystery hid from ages, and from generations, is now made manifest to his saints.* Why was the gospel of Christ so long concealed from the world? Why was it published at that

* Matth. xvi. 18.

† Mark iv. 3.

‡ Acts. iv. 27.

time? What do we find in that particular juncture to render the discovery of the Christian religion more necessary, or its propagation more successful?

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour to account for this part of the divine œconomy, by selecting, in the situation of mankind, some remarkable circumstances, which prove God to have *manifested the mystery of the gospel*, at a time when the world stood most in need of such a revelation, and was best prepared for receiving it.

The appearance of Christ in so late an age, was an objection raised, by his antient adversaries, against the truth of his mission; and modern infidels have not failed to receive and urge it, with their usual confidence and triumph. But, if we can establish the truth of our general proposition, this cavil falls to the ground, and the divine conduct is fully vindicated.

I. About the time of Christ's appearance, there prevailed a general opinion, that the Almighty would send forth some eminent messenger, to communicate a more perfect discovery of his will to mankind. The Supreme Being conducteth all his operations by general laws. It seems to be one among these, that no perfection of any kind can be attained of a sudden. The motion, by which his works advance towards their finished and compleat state, is gradual and progressive. This holds, with regard to all the productions in the natural, and all the changes in the moral world. The same principle appears to have regulated the dispensations of religion. The light of revelation was not poured in upon mankind all at once, and with its full splendor. The obscurity of the dawn went before the brightness of the noon-day. The will of God was at first made known by revelations, useful indeed, but dark and mysterious. To these, succeeded others more clear and perfect. In proportion as the situation of the world made it necessary, the Almighty was pleased farther to open and unfold his scheme.

scheme. And men came by degrees to understand this progressive plan of providence, and to conceive how systems temporary and incomplete might serve to introduce that concluding and perfect revelation, which would *declare the whole council of God to man* *.

The dignity of the person employed to publish this revelation, the virtues of his character, the glory of his kingdom, and the signs of his coming, were described by the antient prophets with the utmost perspicuity. Guided by this *sure word of prophecy*, the Jews of that age, concluded the period predetermined by God, to be then compleated; and that the *fullness of time* being come, the promised Messiah would suddenly appear. Devout persons among them, *waited day and night for the consolation of Israel* †; and the whole nation, groaning under the Roman yoke, and stimulated by the desire of liberty and vengeance, expected their Deliverer with the most anxious impatience.

Nor were these expectations peculiar to the Jews. By their dispersions among so many nations, by their conversation with the learned men among the Heathens, and the translation of their inspired writings into a language almost universal; the principles of their religion were spread all over the east: and it became the common belief that a prince would arise at that time in *Judea*, who would change the face of the world, and extend his empire from one end of the earth to the other.

In his *due time*, did the wisdom of God send forth his Son, not to assume any strange character, or to claim any new and unknown dignity, but to fulfil *all that had been spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since the world began* ‡. While the eyes of men were employed in search of the promised Messiah, while they watched every sign that could indicate his coming, and observed and calculated every circumstance which could lead them to discover him, while *the earnest ex-*

* Acts xx. 27.

† Luke ii. 25, 38.

‡ Acts iii. 21.

pectation of all creatures waited for the revelation of God; at that happy and favourable juncture, was the mystery hid from ages manifested to the world. No wonder, the Jews should receive our Saviour, on his first appearance, not only without prejudice, but even with eagerness and applause: no wonder the Gentiles should gather together unto him, who had so long been the desire of all nations. Had Christ been manifested at a more early period, the world would not have been prepared to meet him with the same fondness and zeal: Had his appearance been put off for any considerable time, men's expectations would have begun to languish, and the warmth of desire, from a delay of gratification, might have cooled and died away.*

II. But, it is not only from circumstances peculiar to the Jews and neighbouring nations, that we conclude the Christian religion to have been published at the most proper time: we propose to bring a farther confirmation of this truth, from a survey of the condition and circumstances of mankind in general. Let us venture then into this large field, and take a view of the political, of the moral, of the religious, and of the domestic state of the world.

We begin, by considering the political state of the world about the time of our Saviour's appearance. The world, in the most early ages, was divided into small independent states, differing from each other in language, manners, laws, and religion. The shock of so many opposite interests, the interfering of so many contrary views, occasioned the most violent convulsions and disorders. Perpetual discord subsisted between these rival states; and hostility and bloodshed never ceased, during that turbulent and restless period. Commerce had not hitherto united mankind, and opened the communication of one nation with another. The world may now be considered as one vast society, closely cemented by mutual wants; each

* Gen. xlix. 10. Hag. ii. 7.

part contributing its share towards the subsistence, the pleasure and improvement of the whole. But in those more simple ages, the intercourse between nations was extremely inconsiderable. Voyages into remote countries, in quest either of wealth or knowledge, were very rare. Men moved in a narrow circle, little acquainted with any thing beyond the limits of their own small territory, and utter strangers to the condition and character of distant nations.

At last the Roman ambition undertook the arduous enterprise of conquering the world, and conducted it with such refined policy, irresistible courage, and inimitable perseverance, as, in the end, crowned the attempt with success. *They trode down the kingdoms, according to Daniel's prophetic description; by their exceeding strength, they devoured the whole earth**. However, by enslaving the world, they civilized it, and while they oppressed mankind, they united them together. The same laws were every where established, and the same languages understood. Men approached nearer to one another in sentiments and manners; and the intercourse between the most distant corners of the earth was rendered secure and agreeable. Satiated with victory, the first emperors abandoned all thoughts of new conquests. Peace, an unknown blessing, was enjoyed thro'out all that vast empire; or if a slight war was waged on an outlying and barbarous frontier, far from disturbing the tranquility, it scarce drew the attention of mankind.

Such was the political state of the world, when Christianity made its first appearance; and, from this representation of it, many circumstances occur to justify the divine wisdom, in chusing that particular conjuncture, to publish it. During the period, which I first described, the propagation of any new religion, must have been extremely slow and uncertain. How could it have forced its way, thro' innumerable difficulties, arising from the unsettled state of the world,

* Dan. vii. 7, 23.

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from the fierceness and animosity of hostile and divided nations? The power of God, no doubt, could have surmounted all these obstacles: but it is observable, that this power is never exerted but on the most necessary occasions. The Almighty seldom effects, by supernatural means, any thing, which could have been accomplished by such as are natural. And were we to judge by maxims merely human, the propagation of Christianity, in these circumstances, would have proved not only a dangerous, but an impossible enterprise.

But, favoured by the union and tranquility of the *Roman* empire, the disciples of Christ executed their commission to great advantage. The success and rapidity, with which they diffused the knowledge of his name over the world, are astonishing. This epistle to the *Colossians*, was writ about thirty years after our Saviour's ascension; and even then, the apostle could assert, that the gospel had been *preached to every creature, which is under heaven* *, i. e. thro' the whole extent of the *Roman* empire. Nations were then accessible, which formerly had been unknown. Under this situation, into which the providence of God had brought the world, the *joyful sound*, in a few years, reached those remote corners of the earth, into which it could not, otherways, have penetrated for many ages.

This view of our subject, presents to us an idea of the Christian religion, equal to the greatest and most magnificent conception of the human mind. The noblest people, that ever entered upon the stage of the world, appear to have been only instruments in the divine hand, for the execution of wise purposes, concealed from themselves. The *Roman* ambition and bravery paved the way, and prepared the world for the reception of the Christian doctrine: They fought and conquered, that it might triumph with the greater ease. *Howbeit, they meant not so, neither did their*

* Col. i. 23.

heart think so; but it was in their heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few *. By means of their victories, the over-ruling wisdom of God established an empire, which really possesses that perpetuity and eternal duration, which they vainly arrogated to their own: he erected *a throne which shall continue for ever †, and of the increase of that government there shall be no end ‡.*

III. Let us consider the state of the world, with regard to morals. We cannot expect to find pure and undefiled virtue, among those people who were destitute of the instructions, the promises, and assistance of divine revelation. Unenlightened reason often errs: undirected virtue always deviates from the right path: But, even in those less favoured ages, righteousness had not altogether *perished from the earth; and the nations which had not the law, did by nature, in some degree, the things contained in the law* ||. These virtuous but feeble efforts of the human mind, were encouraged and seconded by several happy circumstances, in the situation of the world, owing in appearance to the sagacity of men, but ordained in reality by the wisdom of God. One of these was of a singular nature, and well deserves our particular attention.

We have already mentioned the early division of the world into small independent states. These states, unbroken by the refinements of luxury, and animated with the noblest of human passions, struggled for liberty, and obtained it. Lawgivers, intimately acquainted with human nature, deep politicians, and lovers of mankind, arose in different places, and founded those equal and happy governments, which have been the admiration and envy of all succeeding ages. Temperance, frugality, decency, public spirit, love to their fellow-citizens, magnanimity: These are the virtues which flourished under such wise insti-

* Isa. x. 7. † Heb. i. 8. ‡ Isa. ix. 7. || Rom. ii. 14.

tutions. At the same time, in these small commonwealths, the conduct of every citizen was subjected to the eye of the magistrate; and the nature of the government obliged him, to inspect their manners, with severity. The smallest crimes could not escape observation: even dangerous virtues were exposed to censure. On this foundation of public liberty, did ancient virtue rest; an effect of government little known in modern times, wherein the views of legislators are confined to inferior objects. But from this source, were derived all those splendid actions among the heathens, which, on the one hand, have been so invidiously mentioned by infidels, as a reproach to our holy religion, and on the other, so justly celebrated by Christians, in order to rouse the zeal and emulation of a degenerate age.

Virtue, however, did not long enjoy this temporary and precarious support. These wise institutions were the works of men, and mortal like their authors. Some of them perished by the malignity of internal diseases: and, if a vigorous constitution and more skilful management prolonged the period of others, they yielded at last to the violence of external injuries. It was impossible either to divert or resist the torrent of *Roman* power: it gathered strength from opposition, and bore down all nations before it. But, by subduing the world the *Romans* lost their own liberty. Many causes, which it is not our present business to explain, concurred in producing this effect: Many vices, engendered or nourished by prosperity, delivered them over to the vilest race of tyrants that ever afflicted or disgraced human nature.

The alliance betwixt morals and government was now broken; and an influence hitherto so friendly to virtue, became altogether malignant, and was exerted with most fatal success, to poison and debase the human mind. Along with despotic power, entered all those odious vices, which are usually found in its train; and in a short time, they grew to an incredible pitch.

The colours are not too strong, which the apostle employs in drawing the character of that age: contemporary historians justify him, when he describes it *to be alienated from the life of God, walking in vanity thro' the blindness of their minds; and, being past feeling, were given up to lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness* *.

In this time of universal corruption, did the wisdom of God manifest the Christian revelation to the world, not to re-establish virtue upon the same insecure foundation of civil government; but to erect it upon the eternal and immoveable basis of a religion, which teacheth righteousness by the authority of God. What the wisdom of men could do for the encouragement of virtue in a corrupt world, had been tried during several ages; and all human devices were found, by experience, to be of very small avail: so that no juncture could be more proper for publishing a religion, which, independent on human laws and institutions, explains the principles of morals with admirable perspicuity, and enforces the practice of them by most persuasive arguments. Had not Christianity appeared to check and mitigate the pernicious effects of despotic unlimited empire, 'tis hard to say, how far they might have gone towards extinguishing the name and exercise of virtue among men. This we know, that in a most dissolute age, and under the worst government, the primitive Christians attained, in every virtue, to an eminence, of which there is no example in the history of mankind. The spirit of their religion, superior to the corrupt genius of the age, continued pure and vigorous; and men saw with admiration, that when every other foundation of virtue was overthrown, *the foundation of God stood sure, immoveable amidst the floods which came, the rains that descended, and the winds that blew and beat upon it* †.

* Ephes. iv. 17, 18, 19.

† Matth. vii. 25.

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IV. Let us consider the world with regard to its religious state. The national character of the Jews, seems to have been deeply tinctured with superstition. Their early education in *Egypt*, the example of neighbouring nations, influence of the climate, but above all the perverseness of their own disposition, rendered this impression indelible. Obstinate against all the endeavours employed by their divine lawgiver to repress or extirpate it, this superstitious spirit broke out on every occasion. Delighted with the ceremonial prescriptions of the law, the Jews utterly neglected the moral; and, fond of such rites as please the imagination, they undervalued those duties which improve the heart. This unhappy bias was greatly increased by the doctrine of the Pharisees, which reduced the prejudices of their countrymen into a regular system of superstition. By their vain traditions, they added to the load of ceremonies: By their wretched interpretations of the law, they abridged the number of moral precepts. They openly preferred the former before the latter; and substituted observances frivolous and insignificant, in the place of *the weighty matters in the law, judgment, mercy, and faith* *.

While the Pharisees undermined religion, on the one hand, their rivals the Sadducees carried on, from another quarter, a more bold and impious attack against it. By denying the immortality of the soul, they wounded religion in a vital part; and overturned the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which hath been, and must ever be, the chief foundation of virtuous obedience. The practice of these two contending sects, was perfectly suitable to their principles: the followers of the one, were scandalous libertines; the disciples of the other, notorious hypocrites: and between them, the knowledge and power of true religion were entirely destroyed. It was high time then for the wisdom of God to vindicate his injured law, and to revive languishing and decayed religion, among

* Matth. xxiii. 23.

his antient people. To recal the Jews from their former wandrings, the Almighty had with success employed the ministry of his holy prophets; but the malignant distempers of that age, would not have yielded to any common remedy: a conceited and perverse generation would have listened to no inferior messenger; and therefore, the great prophet was sent forth in this due time, to explain, to extend, and to perfect the law, *and to fill Zion with judgment and righteousness* *.

But the deplorable situation of the heathen world with regard to religion, called still more loudly for an immediate interposal of the divine hand. I shall not mention the characters of the heathen deities, infamous for the most enormous crimes; nor describe their religious worship, consisting frequently in the vilest and most shameful rites. Certain it is, the more any man honoured such gods, the worse himself was; and the oftner he served them, the more wicked he would become.

It is the spirit and genius of heathen religion which I shall endeavour to represent. These, according to the apostle's observation, were *in all things too much superstitious* *. Stately temples, expensive sacrifices, pompous ceremonies, magnificent festivals, with all the other circumstances of shew and splendour, were the objects which false religion presented to its votaries: but just notions of God, obedience to his moral laws, purity of heart, and sanctity of life, were not once mentioned as ingredients in religious service. Superstition never prevailed among any people, but at the expence of morals. The heathen superstition, far from giving any aid to virtue, seems not to have had the least connexion with it. No repentance of past crimes, no future amendment of conduct, are ever prescribed by it, as proper means of appeasing the offended deities. "Sacrifice a chosen victim, bow down before an hallowed image, be initiated in the

* Isa. xxxiii. 5.

* Acts. xvii. 23.

sacred mysteries; and the wrath of the gods will be averted, and the thunder drop from their hands." Suitable to these sentiments, is the behaviour of *Balak* king of *Moab*, described by the prophet *Micah*. That prince had provoked the God of *Israel*; and in order to regain his favour, thought of the same means, which superstition employs to mitigate the rage of its false gods. *Wherewith, says he, shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul*? To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God,* were acceptable services, which made no part in the system of heathen religion.

Happily, the wisdom and simplicity of antient government, checked the progress of this infectious principle, and corrected in some degree, its poisonous and destructive qualities. But no sooner had the tyranny of the *Roman* emperors removed this restraint, by subverting liberty, than superstition made its advances on the world by sudden and mighty steps, and exercised an uncontrouled dominion in every corner of the earth. Tyranny and superstition, like those other destroyers of mankind, famine and pestilence, are nearly allied. Superstition breaks the spirit, and prepares it for servitude. Tyranny, for this reason, encourages superstition, and employs it as an useful auxiliary to illegal power. Accordingly, *Rome* adopted the gods of almost every nation, whom she had conquered; and opened her temples to the grossest superstitions of the most barbarous people. *Her foolish heart being darkened, she changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things†.*

* *Micah* vi. 6, 7, 8.

† *Rom.* i. 21, 23.

At this time, therefore, did a good God, in pity to his deluded creatures, publish the Christian revelation. By it, the God of truth was made known; *and the idols of the nations were moved at his presence* †. Rational and sublime in its doctrines, humane and beneficent in its precepts, pure and simple in its worship; no religion was ever so well calculated as Christianity, to repress the inroads of superstition, and to establish an acceptable and manly devotion, consisting *in spirit and in truth* ‡. No period can be mentioned, when instruction in these important articles, would have been more seasonable or necessary. The absurd fictions, and abominable practices of superstition, had gone near to extinguish the natural sentiments of the human mind, concerning the supreme Being, and to banish his name and worship from the earth. No wonder, men, under these circumstances, should listen, with joy, to the Christian revelation, which delivered them from that hateful yoke, and taught them, *to serve God without fear, in holiness, and righteousness before him* *.

V. Let us consider the world with regard to its domestic situation: a view, perhaps, less extensive and magnificent than those, which hitherto have engaged our attention; but not less important. The private and domestic situation of mankind, is the chief circumstance, which forms their character, and the great source of their happiness or misery. Any poison in this fountain, communicates itself to the manners of men; any bitterness there, infects all the pleasures of life. Many circumstances of the most fatal influence on domestic virtue and happiness, occur to attentive observers of the period under review.

Domestic society is founded in the union betwixt husband and wife. Among all civilized nations, this union hath been esteemed sacred and honourable; and from it are derived those exquisite joys or sorrows,

† Isa. xix. 1.

‡ John iv. 24.

* Luke i. 74,

which

which can embitter all the pleasures, or alleviate all the pains in human life. In the antient world, there prevailed two practices equally pernicious to the peace and happiness of the married state. From the most early times polygamy seems to have been universal among the eastern nations; and men married as many wives as their fancy wished for, or their fortune could maintain. Now, this practice not only appears to be contrary to the intention of the Almighty, who at first created but one person of each sex, and hath since preserved an admirable proportion betwixt the number of males and females, whom he sends into the world; but by it likewise, were banished from domestic life, all those enjoyments which sweeten and endear it. Friendship, social intercourse, confidence, and the mutual care of children, were utterly unknown: on the one hand, rigour, voluptuousness, jealousy; on the other, subjection without love, fidelity, or virtue. One half of the human species became the property of the other; and the husband, instead of being the friend and protector of a wife, was no better than the master and tyrant over a slave. The envy and discord which were introduced into the families of *Jacob* and *Elkanah*, by a plurality of wives, are but imperfect pictures of the enormities occasioned by the same practice, under masters less virtuous, and in ages more dissolute and luxurious. Where-ever the Christian religion is established, an end hath been put to an institution so inconsistent with the felicity of domestic life. Marriage suitable to the ordinance of God, is rendered a friendly and undissoluble alliance betwixt two persons; and tranquility, confidence, and joy bless an union, begun and cemented by mutual love.

In the western parts of the world, the maxims with regard to marriage were more conformable to nature: one man was confined to one woman; but at the same time, their laws allowed a practice, which introduced the most fatal disorders into domestic life. The Almighty, *because of the hardness of their hearts*, permitted the Jews, on certain occasions, to
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give a writing of divorcement to their wives *. According to their usual custom, the Jews stretched this indulgence to most extravagant lengths; and, defining the cases in which they pretended divorces to be lawful, with a minute and over-curious accuracy, they altogether perverted the institution of God. Their doctors permitted divorces for causes so trivial and ridiculous, as cannot be mentioned in a grave discourse. The utmost dissolution of manners, was the effect of such licentious opinions: and our Saviour found the abuses to be grown so enormous, as to render the strictest and most precise limitations of the *Mosaic* precept absolutely necessary.

Nor was this matter on any better footing among the heathen nations. Divorces, on very slight pretences, were permitted both by *Greek* and *Roman* legislators. And tho' the pure manners of these republics, restrained, for some time, the operation of such a pernicious institution; tho' the virtue of private persons seldom abused the indulgence which the laws allowed them: yet no sooner had the progress of luxury, and the establishment of despotic power, vitiated the taste of men, than the law with regard to divorces, was found to be amongst the worst corruptions which prevailed in that abandoned age. The facility of separation rendered married persons careless of obtaining or practising those virtues which render domestic life tranquil and delightful. The education of children, was utterly neglected by parents, who often met together, with a scheme of separation in both their thoughts. Marriage, instead of restraining, added to the violence of irregular desire; and under a legal name, became the vilest and most shameless prostitution. From all these causes, the married state fell into disreputation and contempt; and it became necessary, by penal laws, to force men into a society where they expected no secure and lasting happiness. Among the *Romans*, domestic corruption grew, of a

* Mark x. 4, 5.

sudden;

sudden, to an incredible height; and perhaps, in the history of mankind, we can find no parallel to the undisguised impurity and licentiousness of that age*. It was in a good time, therefore, that our Saviour abolished a practice, which had been one of the most fertile sources of these disorders. The bonds of the marriage-union were, by him, rendered almost indissoluble; and the *cords of love* were drawn the closest possible. Political projectors may please themselves with imaginary advantages, resulting from the liberty of divorces; but reason, as well as the experience of mankind, justify the wisdom of the divine decree concerning them. If the manners of men be not extremely pure and simple, the least indulgence in this article hath always proved fatal to the peace and virtue of domestic life; and whatever remains of these we now find in a dissolute age, must be intirely ascribed to that regulation in the gospel†, which superficial reasoners represent as a grievance, tho' it be in truth the greatest blessing to mankind.

If the vices of those, who are at the head of domestic society, needed reformation; the sufferings of those who were subject to them merited relief.

So many are the wants of human society, that far the greater part of mankind is condemned to constant toil and labour in order to supply them. In the ancient world, the condition of this numerous and useful race of men, differed widely from that, wherein they are now placed. They were not freemen, but slaves, who occupied the inferior, tho' necessary, station in human life. Their labour, was not a voluntary duty to the society, which intitled them to a reward; it was an hard task, imposed without their consent, and exacted with the utmost rigour. The number of persons reduced to this unhappy condition, was immense. In those parts of the world, whose history and situation are best known, above two thirds of the whole inhabitants are computed to have been in a

* Rom. i. 26, &c.

† Matth. v. 32.

state of slavery. The persons, the goods, the children of these slaves were the property of their masters, disposed of at pleasure, and transferred, like any other possession, from one hand to another. No inequality of condition, no superiority in power, no pretext of consent, can justify this ignominious depression of human nature, or confer upon one man, the right of dominion over the person of another: but not only doth reason condemn this institution as unjust; experience proved it to be pernicious both to masters and slaves. The elevation of the former, inspired into them pride, insolence, impatience, cruelty, and voluptuousness: the dependent and hopeless state of the latter, dejected the human mind, and extinguished every generous and noble principle in the heart. Were I to mention the laws and regulations of the most civilized states among the antients, concerning these unfortunate sufferers; were I to relate the treatment which they met with, from persons the most renowned for their virtue; maxims so inhumane, and actions so barbarous, would excite the strongest pity and indignation, in an age, which never beheld the tyranny of the oppressor, nor heard the groans of the captive.

'Tis true, while men enjoyed those wise institutions of government, which we formerly described, the state of servitude did not become altogether intolerable; many expedients were used for mitigating the rigour of command, and lightening the yoke of obedience: but, upon establishing despotic government in the *Roman* empire, domestic tyranny rose, in a short time, to an astonishing height. In that rank soil, every vice, which power nourishes in the great, or oppression engenders in the mean, thrived and grew up apace.

Here then is an object worthy the attention of that merciful God, *who delivereth the soul of the afflicted from violence, who beareth the cry of the needy, and him*
who

who hath no helper *. The groans of such an innumerable multitude of his reasonable creatures, bereaved of the noblest privilege of their nature, liberty and independence, would not, we may believe, be uttered in vain. He could not always *keep silence and be still*, when he beheld their wretched situation, so destructive of happiness, and so fatal to virtue. At last, the divine wisdom interposed; and when the evil had become intolerable, and seemed to be past cure, the promulgation of Christianity brought an effectual and timely remedy.

It is not the authority of any single detached precept in the gospel, but the spirit and genius of Christian religion, more powerful than any particular command, which hath abolished the practice of slavery thro' the world. The temper, which Christianity inspired, was mild and gentle; and the doctrines it taught, added such dignity and lustre to human nature, as rescued it from the dishonourable servitude into which it was sunk. All men, of every condition, are declared to be the offspring of the same God, and the heirs of the same heavenly inheritance: one Saviour redeemed them from iniquity by his death, and one spirit worketh powerfully in their hearts. Where-ever such opinions prevail, no human creature can be regarded as altogether insignificant and vile; even the meanest acquire dignity, exterior distinctions disappear, and men approach nearer to that original equality, in which they were at first placed, and are still viewed by their impartial Creator.

What a wonderful and blessed change hath Christianity produced in the face of the world! Along with the knowledge of it, liberty, humanity, and domestic happiness, diffused themselves over every corner of the earth. It is deemed a virtue, to admire and praise those illustrious personages, who delivered mankind from the rage of tyrants, and vindicated the violated laws and constitution of their country: and

* Psal. lxxii. 12-

is no admiration due to the generous spirit of that religion which restored liberty, not to one nation or society alone, but rescued from the worst servitude, far the greater number of the human race, and acquired for them that happy freedom, which they still enjoy? When we behold Christianity making its progress thro' the world, and working, every where, such an important alteration in the condition of mankind; we may well apply to a temporal deliverance, what the prophet spoke concerning a spiritual salvation: *Behold the acceptable year of the Lord is come! Liberty is proclaimed to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; they shall rest from their sorrow, and from their fear, and from the hard bondage wherein they were made to serve* *.

The abolition of domestic slavery was the occasion of another change in the manners of men, which is no less remarkable. Captives taken in war, were, in all probability, the first persons subjected to perpetual servitude: and when the necessities or luxury of mankind increased the demand for slaves, every new war recruited their number, by reducing the vanquished to that wretched condition. Hence proceeded the fierce and desperate spirit, with which wars were carried on among antient nations. While chains and slavery were the certain lot of the conquered, battles were fought, and towns defended, with a rage and obstinacy, which nothing but the horror at such a fate could have inspired: but by putting an end to the cruel institution of slavery, Christianity extended its mild influences to the practice of war; and that barbarous art, softened by its humane spirit, ceased to be so destructive. Secure, in every event, of personal liberty, the resistance of the vanquished became less obstinate, and the triumph of the victor less cruel. Thus humanity was introduced into the trade of war, with which it appears to be almost incompatible; and it is to the merciful maxims of Christianity, much

* Isa. lxi. 1. xiv. 3.

more than to any other cause, that we must ascribe the little ferocity and bloodshed, which accompany modern victories. Even where the passions of men are fiercest, and most highly inflamed, the powerful genius of our religion interposes, and restrains the fury of war, and sets bounds to its destroying rage. The benevolent spirit of the gospel, delivereth the captive from his fetters, *looseth those who were appointed to death* *, and saith to the sword which is ready to devour, *return into thy scabbard, and be still* †.

It hath become a fashionable topic among political reasoners, to celebrate the mildness and humanity of modern manners, and to prefer the character of present times before the antient : to what cause shall we ascribe this important revolution, in the sentiments and dispositions of mankind ? Not to the influence of better instituted governments ; for in legislative wisdom the antients far excelled us : not to the effects of a better-directed education ; that duty, shamefully neglected by us, was among them an object of chief attention : not to our superior refinements in elegant and polite arts ; there we must be content to equal, without pretending to surpass the antients. The Christian religion, *hid from ages, but now manifested to the world*, is the only cause capable to produce, so great an effect. *That wisdom which is from above, is pure, and peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy* ‡. Genuine Christianity is distinguished above all other religions, by the mildness of its spirit : the enemy of every practice which hardens the heart : the encourager of every virtue, which renders the character humane. Where ever it hath been established in purity, and practised with zeal ; *kindness, long-suffering, meekness, bowels of mercies, charity* ||, are the graces which accompany it. Even the vices and inventions of men, which have mingled themselves with the truths of God, have not been able intirely to destroy their

* Psal. ciii. 20.

† Jer. xlvii. 7.

‡ James iii. 12.

|| Col. iii. 12.

effects. Under all disadvantages, the genius of the gospel exerts itself, civilizing the fiercest and most barbarous nations, and inspiring a gentleness of disposition, unknown to any other religion. Along with the best spiritual blessings, the most valuable temporal mercies have been communicated to the world, by Christianity. It not only sanctifies our souls, but refines our manners; and while it gives the promises of the next life, it improves and adorns the present: that happy change, which the wisdom of man could not effect, God in his good time accomplished by *manifesting to the world the mystery hid from ages and generations.*

These observations, which we have made, suggest many useful reflections, with regard to the future and universal propagation of Christian knowledge. At the time when the disciples of Christ set out, in obedience to their Lord's command, *to teach all nations*; no undertaking could appear, in the judgment of man, more wild and improbable: but, besides the blessing of God, which accompanied them wherever they went, we have discovered several circumstances in the situation of the world, which contributed powerfully towards the success and facility of their enterprize. Aided by these, *the word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly* *. *The weakness of God became stronger than men; and in a short time, he enabled the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are strong; and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are* †. That the same effectual blessing of God still continueth to second every sincere and vigorous attempt, to spread the knowledge of his name, we have good reason to believe. What powerful unknown causes may co-operate with this blessing of the Almighty, we are not yet permitted to discover. It cannot, however, be more improbable, that the influences of Christia-

* Acts vi. 7.

† 1 Cor. i. 25, 27, 28.

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nity shall reach farther, than it once was, that they should reach so far. And, after we have seen the light of the gospel penetrate into so many *dark places of the earth*; why doeth it seem incredible, that its splendor should, at last, fill the world, and scatter the remainder of darkness which covereth the nations?

It is obvious to observe one circumstance, which cannot fail of introducing the gospel into distant nations with great advantage. That part of the world, wherein Christianity is established, infinitely surpasses the rest in all the sciences and improvements which raise one nation above another in reputation or power. Of this superiority, the *Europeans* have availed themselves to the utmost, in every project for extending their empire or commerce; and have brought a great part of the globe into a dependence, either upon their arts or arms. Now, these same attainments in science or policy, might be employed to good purpose, on the side of religion: and tho' hitherto subservient to the designs of interest or ambition, may we not flatter ourselves, that, at last, they shall become noble instruments in the hand of God, for preparing the world to receive the gospel?

This glorious prospect may be distant; but it is not imaginary. Even in a degenerate age, zealous and active spirits have arisen, and societies have been formed, upon the generous plan of propagating the knowledge of Christ to nations *far off, which never heard his fame, nor have seen his glory* *. What they have already done, encourages the most sanguine hopes of farther success. And, if it shall please God to increase the number, and *strengthen the hands*, of such well-disposed persons: if he shall see fit, *to hasten his time when one shall become a thousand, and a small one strong* †: then might we expect that *the knowledge of the Lord would fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea* ‡; that *the desert would blossom as the rose* ||, and

* Isa. lxvi. 19.

† Ibid. xi. 9.

‡ Isa. lx. 2.

|| Ibid. xxxv. 1.

the wilderness become a fruitful field * : then might the spirit of Christianity, which languishes so visibly in those places where it hath long been planted, revive with new vigour in unknown lands, and shine with its first splendor, among *the people who now sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death* † : Then might the solitary place rejoice ‡, the barren break forth into singing ||, and the tongue of the dumb praise the Lord ¶.

*. Isa. xxxii. 15. † Matth. iv. 16. ‡ Isa. xxxv. 1.
|| Ibid. liv. 1. ¶ Ibid. xxxv. 6.

The glorious prospect may be distant; but it is not imaginary. Even in a degenerate age, nations and active spirits have arisen, and societies have been formed, upon the generous plan of propagating the knowledge of Christ to nations far off, which were almost the same, as have been already done, encourages the most sanguine hopes of farther success. And, if it shall please God to make the number, and strengthen the hands, of such well-disposed persons: if he shall see fit to bestow his grace and power upon a thousand, and a small strength: then might we expect that the knowledge of the Lord would fill the world, as the waters cover the earth: that the light would blossom as the rose, and

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† Isa. lxx. 1. ‡ Ibid. xxxv. 1. || Ibid. xxxv. 6. ¶ Ibid. xxxv. 6.

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DISCOURSE XXI.

CHRIST the Light of the World.

[A M O R Y.]

JOHN viii. 12.

Then spake Jesus again to them saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darknes, but shall have the light of life.

THESE words contain an argument used by our Saviour with his hearers, to prevail upon them to submit to his authority, and embrace his religion. The argument is this: That in this method they would gain assurance in matters of very great importance, as to which they had before been ignorant or uncertain; such clear light as would give them full satisfaction of mind at present, and conduct them to eternal happiness. *Light*, by an easy and elegant metaphor, signifies knowledge or instruction; because what the one is to the eye for guiding the body, the other is to the mind for informing the judgment, and directing the moral conduct. He therefore that gives instruction to others, may be called a light to them; and he that gives instruction to all mankind in affairs of the greatest importance, and such instruction as would lead them, if pursued, to never-ending life and happiness, may justly be stiled *the light of the world, and the light of life.* As

the sun is, to the natural world, the common fountain of light, such was Jesus, by his doctrines and precepts, to the moral; his religion being adapted for the instruction and guidance of all mankind, and recommended to the world with the brightest evidences of divine authority. Whoever therefore impartially considers the doctrines, precepts, and promises of the gospel, may be easily convinced, that our Saviour, with the justest reason, assumed this title, *the light of the world, the light of life*; for, besides his giving mankind a clear and consistent summary of those religious truths and duties which were discoverable by reason, and free from all those errors men had before mixed with them, he discovered to them several great and important truths, as to which they were before ignorant, or in doubt; truths which have the mightiest influence to excite mankind to the practice of goodness, to clear the darkness and confusion they were involved in, and guide them to life and happiness.

My present business will be to make good this assertion of our Saviour in the text, by an enumeration of particulars; from which it will appear, that our Saviour revealed to the world several noble truths before unknown, or not clearly and fully known; truths of the greatest service to the virtue and happiness of mankind. As I go over the several instances, I shall endeavour to make it evident, that the doctrines and precepts added by the gospel to natural religion, and the truths which the world knew, or might have known before, are, in themselves credible, worthy the perfections of God, and accommodate to the state of mankind, and therefore highly advantageous for us to know or practise; and that this, which may be called the *internal proof* of Christianity, is a strong inducement to every considerate person, to embrace the Christian religion, and follow our Saviour, who was indeed *the light of the world*, and *the light of life*, conducting men to life eternal. Though some of the truths I shall instance in, were before discovered to

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the Jews in the *Old Testament*, yet, as to these, our Saviour justly claims the honour of being *the light of the world*, since it was *purely by means of his religion* they were made known to *all* mankind; and though some others were more fully revealed by his apostles than by our Lord himself, yet the honour of these belongs to him, since he taught his apostles these, either immediately or by the divine spirit, which, after his ascension, he sent down upon them. That this discourse may not run out too great a length, omitting others, I shall confine myself to the following instances:

The account Christianity gives us of the original of evil: the doctrine of a *particular* providence: the *full assurance* of the pardon of *all* sins on repentance; and the dispensing this pardon in a way consistent with the honour of the divine holiness and government, through the death and mediation of the Son of God: the *full* and *express* promise of divine assistance: the information, that the *present* is a *final state* of trial: and that the reward of the imperfect virtue of a short life, will be *complete* and *everlasting* happiness: and particularly, that our victories over the flesh, and keeping it in subjection to reason, shall be recompenced by raising our bodies from the grave, glorious, spiritual, powerful, and immortal: the setting apart a *seventh* day for the public worship of God, and more intire application to the duties of piety and virtue: the institution of the sacraments, and the ministry. —These additional doctrines and duties will, upon a review, appear improvements of natural religion worthy of God, for their tendency to render our piety and virtue more easy and perfect; and proofs that our Saviour, who communicated the knowledge of them to mankind, was *the light of the world*, and *the light of life*.

I. The account Christianity gives us of the entrance of evil, moral and natural, into the world, and its prevalency, is of great advantage to us ; and by informing mankind of this, our Saviour proved himself *the light of the world*: besides what reason offers, for vindicating the divine perfections and providence in this difficult inquiry, to which Christians have an equal right with the Deists, revelation acquaints us with several particulars of great use for clearing the difficulty. Reason informs us, 'tis fit intelligent and free beings should be tried and approved, before they are rewarded, and be established in virtue, before they are fixed, unalterably, in happiness : since otherwise God would not govern them according to their nature, which renders them capable of an *approved virtue*, and they could not enjoy the highest satisfaction of all ; the satisfaction arising from conscious integrity, maintained amidst difficulties and temptations, and from thus rendering themselves proper objects of the divine complacency. From reason we farther learn, that if it be fit our love to God and goodness should be tried by difficulties and temptations, it really makes no difference on the whole, whether these be more or fewer, stronger or weaker, provided our great Creator and Governor make answerable allowances, or grant answerable assistances ; proportion the reward to the difficulties of the conflict, and, accepting lower attainments in goodness where the opposition is stronger, reward them as he would higher attainments in more advantageous circumstances. That God will thus deal with us we are assured by reason, since he is infinitely wise and good, knows our frame, knows what in every action is *strictly ours*, and what is to be imputed to the unavoidable influence of constitution, education, and the like ; sees the strength of the virtuous disposition, though struggling beneath, and almost over-whelmed by opposite inclinations and disadvantageous external circumstances,

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cumstances, 'tis scarce discernable by human eyes ; and must approve, love, and reward us, in proportion to what is properly our own in every virtuous action, and deduct from the account of every action, in appearance vicious, whatever is really owing to causes and circumstances out of our power. Reason farther informs us, that the strong inclinations in our frame to sensible good, and aversions from sensible evil, and the passions founded on these, which occasion so much irregularity in our conduct, are yet proper trials of our virtue ; which is to shew its strength in the steady government of them ; and that all the *natural evils* we complain of, as want, pain, sickness, disappointments, and the like, are either proper correctives of vice, or necessary for exercising, approving, or increasing our submission to God, our love to goodness, our compassion to the unhappy, and numerous other virtues ; the present internal satisfactions, and future rewards of which, will abundantly compensate for all we suffer in their practice. These, and other considerations, reason offers in vindication of the wisdom, holiness, and goodness of God, which seem impeached by the strong propensities in our constitution, to objects that prove the occasions of sin, and by the many natural evils which abound amidst his works. And this defence is strengthened by the Christian revelation, which informs us, that this state of things was not the *original appointment* of God, but took its rise from the *wilful transgression* of the first parents of mankind (a) ; that their sin would not have been suffered to produce such effects, had not God provided an equal remedy, *fore-ordained before the foundation of the world* (b) ; had he not determined to make answerable allowances (c), and give answerable assistances ; had he not, in consideration of the sharpness of the trial, appointed it to be but short, and not only resolved to accept an imperfect virtue, but reward it, through the obedience of his Son, with

(a) Gen. chap. iii.

(b) 1 Pet. i. 20.

(c) Gen. iii. 15.

perfect and *everlasting happiness* (d), with *eternal life* (e), the reward annexed, in the original constitution, to unfinning obedience; so that *as in Adam all die, in Christ all are made alive* (f). This solution St. Paul gives us at large, *Rom. v. from verse 12. to the end*, where he expressly assures us, that all the ill effects owing to the disobedience of the first *Adam*, were fully remedied by the good effects following the perfect obedience of the second; and, *that as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to the justification of life; and where sin abounded, in its pernicious fruits, grace did much more abound in the contrary.*

As for the vanity, disappointments, and wretchedness which attend the present state, the permission of these appear wise and kind; since we are, according to the doctrine of the gospel, after a few days spent here, designed for a spiritual and divine happiness in another world (g), and hereby prevented from easily giving up ourselves to *sensual Good* (h), to the debasing our spirits, spoiling their relish for rational pleasures, and losing this divine everlasting felicity (i). The superstitious and dreadful apprehensions of the Deity, which the view of the world of mankind might otherwise occasion, are, by this representation of the divine designs towards us, intirely prevented; and we are formed to the highest veneration and love, to a firm trust and a cheerful resignation to an infinitely wise and good God, who over-rules what to appearance are the greatest evils, for the production of the greatest good. We are also, by the scripture account of the fall and its consequences, hindred from indulging to the violence of inclination and passion, under pretence that they are *natural*; as it teaches us that this is not a part of *original* nature, that the permission of it was designed for the trial of our virtue, and, that by being strictly moderated, it may prove the occa-

(d) *Rom. v. 19.*(e) *John x. 10.*(f) *1 Cor. xv. 22.*(g) *Heb. xi. 13.*(h) *Chap. xii. 1-11.*(i) *Luke xvi. 19,*

and following verses,

sion of a more approved virtue, and a higher happiness (k). We are also, by this account, secured against that melancholy notion, and its discouraging consequences, that these strong irregular propensions are the effects of our own sins, in an imagined state of existence before we entered these bodies, which yet was the best account the best philosophers, without revelation, gave of the present state of mankind; an account which made what was otherwise at worst but an infelicity, appear a guilt, or the effect and punishment of it, and tended to discourage us in the struggle, since we had less reason to expect favourable allowances and assistances from God, if these propensions were of our own contracting; and could have less satisfaction in a sincere and approved virtue, because imperfect, while we thought this imperfection owing to our own wilful transgressions in a pre-existent state. These advantages which the gospel supplies us with, for solving the grand difficult question of, *The origin of evil*, should greatly recommend the gospel to every sober Deist, who is equally concerned with the Christian, to vindicate the divine perfections, and consistently with these to account for moral and natural evil. This hath not been duly considered by some of them, in their objections against this part of Christianity, who have talked as if they were not equally obliged to account for these, or as if *revelation* brought those evils into the world which it found in it, at the same time supplying us with the best remedies against them.

II. The doctrine of a *particular providence*, which reason renders highly probable, is made certain by the gospel; and by assuring us of this, our Saviour justified his claim to be *the light of the world*. The sacred writings inform us, that God not only governs the world by a *general* providence, loves holiness and hates vice, and will finally make religion and virtue

(k) James i. 12---15.

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the interest of all their votaries, and the vitious miserable, according to their demerits, but that he orders the particular circumstances of all, especially of the pious and good, after a manner that may prove most favourable to their piety and virtue, and their greatest happiness upon the whole: that the evils of life are not *merely* the result of the present constitution of things, in the general established by God for wise reasons, but his fatherly chastisements, and the effects of his love, designed for our amendment (l), or as trials to exercise and improve us in virtue (m), and always allotted us in the best seasons for answering these purposes: that not the smallest event is exempted from his direction, since *a sparrow falls not to the ground without our heavenly father* (n), and by him *even the hairs of our head are numbered*. We know, from the scriptures, *that all things work together for good to them that love God* (o); that *if in all our ways we acknowledge him, he will direct our paths* (p), and *if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will add all other things unto us* (q); that if we commend our ways to him in well doing, and by prayer and trust, *cast our cares upon him, he will care for us* (r); and not only reward us at last, according to the degrees of our piety and obedience, but so direct all the events of our lives as may best promote them. What is there can cheer the minds of the considerate like these assurances, amidst the folly, weakness, and uncertainty that inseparably attend the present state? No persuasion like this, for raising a man above all temptations, and leaving him nothing to be concerned about, but doing his duty in whatever station of life he may be cast: nothing like this, to calm his mind and make him easy under afflictions, especially those brought on him by the folly or wickedness of others; since he is thus assured, that nothing out of his own

(l) Heb. xiii. 7. and following.
x. 29, 30.
vi. 23.

(o) Rom. viii. 28.
(r) 1 Pet. v. 7.

(m) James i. 2.
(p) Prov. iii. 6.

(n) Matt.
(q) Matt.

power can really hurt him. It is therefore a great excellency in the Christian revelation, that it not only discovers to us, in the strongest light, those general principles of the divine perfections and providence on which this faith is built, but places, in the clearest and most familiar light, this particular important truth, and gives it the sanction of the most express authority.

III. The assurance that God's pardoning mercy extends to *all sins* and *all sinners*, on condition of repentance and amendment, is another invaluable part of the Christian revelation; and by assuring us of this, Christ was, in a most desirable instance, *the light of a guilty world*. Though reason gives good ground to hope, God will pardon the penitent and thoroughly reformed, yet how far his pardoning mercy shall extend, whether to great sins repeated after frequent renunciations, to sins that have left a great disability on the mind for the future practice of goodness, or which have had most mischievous consequences to the world beyond our power to repair, and especially where a great part of life hath been wasted in the service of vice; as to these particulars, reason cannot give a distinct answer entirely satisfying: at most 'tis silent, whether such great sinners, though real penitents, shall receive any reward, and of what kind and degree. God is free in the exercise of his goodness, and dispensing unmerited and forfeited favours; and therefore what share such shall receive, it cannot certainly say. It is therefore an invaluable part of the Christian scheme, admirably suited to the frail and corrupt state of mankind, that it assures the forgiveness of all sins to the penitent, that alone against the *Holy Ghost* being excluded (*f*), because it renders repentance impossible, destroying all the gospel-motives to it, by ascribing to evil spirits the fullest evidences of its truth, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

(*f*) Matt. xii. 24, and following verses.

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How should all of us, therefore, who are conscious to so many offences against God, and need so much his pardoning mercy, rejoice in those full assurances, *that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin* (t), and that *all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven* to the penitent and reformed (u)? What can be better adapted to beget an ingenuous sorrow and repentance, for having offended so good a God, and to animate our endeavours after the most advanced degrees of holiness, as the best return to so gracious and so compassionate a sovereign and friend? What can better prevent the hardening influence of despair, or what inspire a stronger abhorrence of vice, than a view of its ingratitude and baseness, as committed in abuse of such goodness? And farther allowing the most, that reason, when cool and undisturbed, could in a good degree assure us, that the pardoning mercy of God would reach to all sins repented of, it would yet be greatly desirable to have express assurances of this from God himself, in his word. Guilt and its consequents, grief and fear, cloud the mind, make truths of this kind appear in a doubtful light, and incline us, even when we most need the assurance of their truth, to reverse those judgments we had formed in our cool hours, and to doubt of the mercies of God extending to us so guilty (w): whereas the clear and express declarations of God in his word *always remain the same*; and as at such times we are in no disposition to doubt the truth of his word, neither can we question the extent of his grace when so fully asserted.

IV. The manner of dispensing this free and extensive grace of God, through the atonement of the blood of Christ, and his consequent mediation at the right hand of God, is only to be learned from the Christian revelation; and by discovering this, our Saviour proved himself to be *the light of the world*: he

(t) 1 John i. 7. (u) Matt. xii. 31. (w) See Mr. Grove on the proof of a future state, from reason, chap. ix. § 3, 7, and 8.

tells us himself, *his blood was to be shed for many, for the remission of sins* (x); and in *Christ we have redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of the Father's grace* (y): *he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification* (z). *Who then shall condemn? Shall Christ who died? yea rather who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us* (a): God, who is not only a Being supremely good, but a most wise and holy Governor, was concerned so to dispense his pardoning mercy to a sinful world, as at the same time to encourage them to repent, and to prevent their presuming on his goodness, and abusing its rich discoveries to greater corruption and wickedness, the natural disposition of all sinners. Guilt makes men suspicious and fearful of God; and while they are uncertain of his accepting them, they cannot easily resolve on the labours of mortification and a thorough amendment; they therefore need the fullest discoveries and strongest assurances of the divine forgiveness, to encourage them to scatter their guilty fears, and melt and overcome the obstinacy of their hearts: at the same time, the farther they have proceeded in vice, and the more they want those assurances of mercy, the more disposed are they to abuse them; to think sin, they have so long indulged, a light evil, when God freely forgives it, and to neglect true holiness as an unnecessary, because difficult attainment. Though God, as they think he could do no less, demand repentance and future obedience, yet, they fancy, he will not *rigorously* insist on *them*, but be as ready to excuse or forgive *future* transgressions as *past*. Obedience to the laws of God, and the steady practice of true goodness, are essential to the perfection and happiness of mankind: an infinitely wise, holy, and good God, cannot but will men should practise these, and do whatever is be-

(x) Matt. xxvi. 28.

(y) Eph. i. 7.

(z) 2 Rom. iv. 25.

(a) viii. 34.

coming him to promote their practice. It was therefore worthy the wisdom of the great Governor of the world, to temper his full discoveries of pardoning mercy to sinners, with a proportionable discovery of his abhorrence of vice, and love of holiness: and this he hath done, by giving up a person of such high dignity as his only begotten Son, not only to be *made flesh*, and live upon earth for the promotion of piety and virtue, by his instructions and example, but to die on the cross as an atoning sacrifice; by appointing that He, who willingly undertook our cause, and gave up himself to this difficult work for our sakes, should, to manifest the Father's concern for his violated laws, suffer and die to confirm the obligation of them; and discovering, in this submission, the most excellent virtue and obedience, cause the concessions made to him in favour of guilty men, to appear as the reward of his extraordinary merit, as well as encouragements to the penitent to exert themselves to the utmost. What could more demonstrate the concern of the divine Being, to advance holiness and root out vice, than his subjecting, for this end, his only begotten Son to the meanness and labours of a mortal condition, and the suffering of death? What could more declare his abhorrence of the disobedience of mankind (excepting the destruction of the disobedient, which this method was designed to prevent) than his not empowering, even his own Son, to grant us a full pardon, but on condition of his becoming *obedient unto death* (b), and thus appointing him who was not only most dear to his father, as his only begotten, but as perfectly submissive and obedient, to expiate our sins by his death, that we might be effectually convinced what our sins deserved; and on account of the Son's meritorious obedience and death, granting him a power to give not only a full pardon of sins past, but eternal life to those that believe, that are thoroughly repentant, and sincerely, though imperfectly good (c).

(b) Rom. v. 19.

(c) John xvii. 1---5.

The merciful goodness of God, and the motives to repentance, from ingenuity and gratitude to a pardoning God, are equally great and affecting, as if our sins had been forgiven without a propitiation; nay greater, since God himself provides the propitiation (*d*), and thus shews it is not owing to an indifference to our sins, but to his unbounded mercy and goodness, that he forgives them. We are also strongly convinced of the great malignity of moral evil, by the agonies the Redeemer endured to take it away; and engaged not to abuse the goodness of God so grossly, as to continue practising what he *hated*, more than he *loved* the life of his own Son.

If it be objected, *Where is the Justice of punishing the innocent, that the guilty may escape?* I answer, There is no injustice in permitting those evils to fall on the innocent, which to the *guilty* are *punishments* of sin, when *important* ends of the divine government are hereby answered; when the suffering party *voluntarily* submits to those evils, and when even *those evils* (his submitting to them being in him an instance of the most perfect virtue) *procure* to him the *highest* happiness and reward. And this is the scripture account of the affair: *No man took our Saviour's life from him, but he laid it down of himself; and therefore the Father loved him, because he laid down his life, and because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* (*e*); therefore God *highly exalted him, and gave him a name above every name* (*f*), and a *power to give eternal life to as many as he had given him* (*g*); that is, to all the penitent and sincerely good. Suppose a king, out of a concern to maintain his authority, and secure the future obedience of his subjects, refuse, even at the request of his own son, to recal banished rebels, unless his son would go to them in their banishment, and endeavour personally to reclaim them to a sense of their rebellion, and of their

(*d*) 1 John iv. 9, 10.

(*e*) John x. 17, 18.

(*f*) Phil. ii. 9.

(*g*) John xvii. 2.

duty, and the prince willingly undertake this, 'tis certain, by living for a time with the banished, he suffers what is the *punishment* of their rebellion, though himself innocent; and this without any injustice, because it is his own *choice*, and because he hath the *satisfaction* of reclaiming the rebellious, and, as a *reward*, sees them restored to their country, and receives himself a share in his father's throne. It is the happiness of God himself to communicate good; and this our Saviour is rewarded with in the highest degree, by receiving a power to confer everlasting happiness on all the human race, who do not absolutely unfit themselves for it. In this method of shewing favour to mankind the innocent is not punished, that the guilty, as such, may escape; but he suffers those evils, to excite in them a sense of their guilt, and bring them to a temper which may qualify them for mercy. The guilty, after all, are not forgiven but upon condition of repentance and reformation, which is the whole the objectors contend for, as necessary to secure the honour of the divine laws and government: and if, *besides* the repentance and reformation of the guilty, the sufferings and death of our *voluntary* Mediator are required and accepted, the honour of the divine holiness and government are certainly *better* guarded.

It is true, did the obedience and death of Christ excuse us from the necessary obligations of holiness and obedience, and would God on account of these receive and make happy the unholy and impenitent, there would then be unanswerable strength in the objection; but there is really none, when this atonement is so propounded as to increase our obligations to repentance and holiness (*b*); and we are not allowed, on any other terms, to expect advantage from it (*i*). *Christ crucified*, for our sins, is therefore *the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation of all them that believe* (*k*). And this method of reconciliation, though reason could not discover it, is yet

'b) Titus ii. 14. (*i*) Rom. vi. 1--17. (*k*) 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

readily approved and submitted to by reason when discovered by God, since it is not only not unreasonable, but worthy of God, and most frequently and expressly taught in a revelation, which has all desirable external evidences of a divine original.

I have been the longer on this head, because this is a distinguishing doctrine of the Christian religion, and without supposing its truth, the appointing a Being of such unparalleled dignity as the only begotten Son of God to become incarnate and die, appears unaccountable, since a common prophet might have answered every other purpose, excepting the *taking away* the sins of the *world* by his *death*, and *regaining immortality* for mankind by his *perfect obedience*.

As to the mediation of Christ, founded on his atonement (*l*), and our being appointed to *ask every blessing in the name of Christ* (*m*), this constitution is fitted to keep alive a sacred awe of the divine Majesty (*n*); since, as sinners, we cannot be freely admitted to approach him, but through his son's mediation (*o*), and to cherish the deepest humility in us amidst the privileges we are advanced unto, and the large expectations in which we are indulged. It naturally preserves on the mind a strong abhorrence of sin, which bars our free access to an infinitely good God, while, at the same time, we are raised to a filial confidence in our approaches to God, who can address him in the name of his Son, who is the *propitiation* for our sins (*p*). And it farther instructs us, most convincingly, in the love of the Deity to holiness and goodness, and his concern for our perfection in them, when every prayer, in the name of Christ, is fitted to put us in mind of God's rewarding his Son's love to mankind, and his expensive undertaking to restore holiness and happiness to the human race, with the power of dispensing those invaluable blessings of pardon, the aids of the divine spirit, and eternal life;

(*l*) Rom. viii. 34. (*m*) 1 John ii. 1, 2. (*n*) John xvi. 23, 26. (*o*) Heb. xii. 24, 28, 29. (*p*) Heb. x. 19--22.

a reward and happiness than which there cannot be a greater conferred, since it is the highest happiness of God himself that he is perfectly good, and communicates the greatest good; and therefore the noblest discovery of his love to the perfection of goodness in his Son, that he thus rewards his labours to restore mankind to virtue, perfection and happiness.

V. The full and express promises of *divine assistance* in the practice of virtue, and the pursuit of immortality, are another valuable part of the Christian revelation; a favour reason could not assure us of, though it gave good hopes of its being granted; and by assuring us of these, our Saviour merited the title of *the light of the world*. To reasonable men, apprehensive of the excellency and obligation of piety and goodness, there is nothing so discouraging as the consciousness of their weakness, and the difficulty they find from within to surmount temptation, and act with steadiness in conformity to the convictions of their minds; incumbered as they are by irregular inclinations and habits, continually diverted by sense, often set wrong by bad education, opposed by the follies, vices, and ill examples of others, and frequently losing sight of their duty and the motives to it, in the most important seasons of trial, and finding it returning at last only to shame them for an unsuitable conduct. In such circumstances nothing can be more encouraging, nothing more valued by an honest mind, than the assurance of divine aids. How desirable the assurance, that an ever present God, who knows our frame, is tenderly concerned for our perfection and happiness, and will not only make every favourable allowance, but, if we exert ourselves, and implore his aids, proportion our strength to our trials (*q*), keep off temptations, which in a careless or soft hour would ruin us, *never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able* (*r*), or by peculiar assistances make every trial issue in the

(*q*) Matt. vi. 13.(*r*) 1 Cor. x. 13.

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(*r*) Phil. ii.

establishment of our piety and virtue, and the increase of our future happiness! No temptation can stand against an honest mind, full of a sense of the excellency and importance of holiness, thus encouraged, and thus supported. How valuable therefore are these assurances, that *if earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children, much more will our heavenly Father give his holy spirit to them that ask him* (s); that his grace shall be sufficient for us, and his strength appear illustrious in our weakness (t); and that *if we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, with a holy caution, lest by negligence or vitious indulgence we forfeit his kind influences, he will work in us both to will and to do* (u)! What an advantage the presence and care of a prudent, tender, and faithful friend, who will watch our unguarded hours, and insinuate the rules and encouragements of religion, in the most favourable or the most needful seasons! How much more advantageous and animating the constant vigilance and favour of an ever present God, who hath an immediate access to our souls, who knows them in all their weaknesses, and who can insinuate or excite, in the most prevailing way, a sense of our duty or danger, and the noblest motives to exert ourselves! Reason could not give an absolute assurance of these assistances; for though it convinces us we need them, yet, till we know how we came to need them, it could not certainly say, our wanting these was not a proof we had before forfeited them. Farther, though reason can assure us that God will make gracious allowances for temptation and opposition, that our *abilities* are the *measure* of our *duty*, and that God will reward us at last, according to the sincerity, vigour, and constancy of our endeavours, yet it could not certainly inform us, that God had not left us to struggle with all opposition in our own strength; and that having given us understanding, conscience, and li-

(s) Luke xi. 13. Matt. vii. 7--11.

(u) Phil. ii. 12, 13.

(t) 2 Cor. xii. 9.

berly, he did not expect we should, with these alone, make good our ground. The effect of this apprehension, even in the best, would be disheartning their attempts after exalted degrees of virtue, and disposing them to be content with lower and easier attainments, esteeming the other as above them; and thus failing of that eminent virtue they might really arrive at, and with ease too, if encouraged by the hope of divine assistances, and blessed with them. Though some therefore of the Heathen philosophers (*x*), cheered their disciples with the hope of divine assistances, yet others (*y*), who were great friends to virtue, were of this opinion, That success in things without us might be asked of the gods, but virtue was to be fetched wholly from ourselves. In contradiction to this opinion, what a vast advantage is it to consider ourselves as always acting under the observation of the best of Beings, ever ready to cherish and confirm, as well as approve and reward our virtue! The consciousness of the presence of such a being, and such a friend, and the constant apprehension of his perfections and love to us, which these expectations from him naturally cherish, will often, without any additional strength communicated from above, give a force to the mind, which reason, destitute of this hope, is a stranger to, and be crowned with success. In a world, where virtue is often so ill treated, and so violently opposed, where ill examples abound, where vice is often caressed, and men are remarkable at the same time for wickedness and prosperity, what a strengthening to virtue is the consciousness of the presence, aid, and favour of the supreme Being! And what an advantage is it to Christians, that we are allowed, yea, obliged to pray to God, and depend on him for his assistance? Thus keeping warm the conviction of his presence

(*x*) Socrates in Xen. de Mem. l. i. c. 4. and Plat. Alc. secundo Xenoph. Cyropæd. l. viii. c. 45. and Antonin. l. ix. 140.

(*y*) ---Virtutem autem nemo unquam acceptam Deo retulit--- Fortunam a Deo petendam, a seipso sumendam sapientiam. Cic. de Nat. Deorum, l. iii. 136.

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whom, else, we might too easily forget; by degrees concluding, that if God would not assist virtue now, he would not reward it at last, and, if it was so little his care, it should be less ours. This advantage is yet more considerable with regard to those who, by faulty compliances, have strengthened irregular inclinations, and by contracting habits of vice, have rendered a virtuous temper next to impossible to them alone. What would remain for these, but to sit down in a full-blown despair of virtue and true happiness, or to give up the reins to their vicious passions, if destitute of divine aids? How could reason barely from their want of help, assure such of obtaining it, when their great want was a proof of their former great guilt and abuse of their liberty? To have gone far in vice, is the case of a great part of mankind, and was the case of the whole world, with a few exceptions, when the gospel appeared. How important then, how necessary a doctrine was that of divine assistances, and the promise of the spirit? and what a proof is it of the excellency of our religion, and its proceeding from the great lover of virtue? If you take those most favourably inclined and circumstanced for becoming good, yet their consciousness of the changeableness of their resolutions for virtue, of the constant weight of sense, inclination, passion, custom and ill example, of their being easily surprised in an unguarded hour, and in a few moments losing the ground they had been long gaining; how heartless must it render their endeavours, in comparison of his who is encouraged by the promise of the spirit? Will they not in prudence decline the noblest instances of a virtuous conduct, because difficult to accomplish, and chuse that *mean* in religion and virtue, which is only eligible with regard to external possessions? Since therefore these assistances may be so dispensed as to leave room for the exercise and increase of a *real virtue* in us, since human virtue, and consequently human happiness, may be thus advanced to the highest perfection, the promise

of divine assistances must be allowed a very valuable part of the Christian revelation, and ought to recommend it to every man sensible of his frailty, and of the infinite excellency and importance of true goodness.

VI. The certain information that the *present* is a *final* state of *trial*, and that the reward given to the *imperfect* virtue of a *short* life will be *perfect* and *everlasting* happiness, is another glorious discovery we owe to the gospel; by revealing which our Saviour approved himself *the light of the world*, and *the light of life*. It was the opinion of some of the wisest Heathens (z), That though this life was a state of trial, the issue was not final: that because the virtue of the best here was imperfect, they would not immediately pass into a state of compleat and everlasting felicity, but be continued on their trial in another life, in still more favourable circumstances for virtue, and not be fixed unchangeably happy till they had reached perfection: and that although the wickedness of the wicked would be punished in the next state, yet none besides the *desperately wicked* and *absolutely incurable*, even by *punishments*, would be *utterly ruined*; but that after smarting some time, to bring them to themselves, they would be again tried, though in circumstances less advantageous for their reaching virtue and happiness: and perhaps, without the light of revelation, this may be thought the most probable account of a future state. These notions, 'tis obvious, may be easily abused by ill-disposed men, for their encouragement under the neglect of true goodness at present, and leave them, with less reluctance, to follow their inclinations, when they have the hope of amending their bad conduct in a future state, though evil habits, after a while, render it almost impossible in the present. These apprehensions of a future state cannot rouse them from their inattention and vicious indulgences, like the belief that the *present* is a *final state of trial*, that

(z) See Plato's *Phædo*, and Virgil's *Æneid*. B. vi. v. 699, &c.

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now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation (a). That 'tis appointed for men once to die, and after death the judgment (b), when we shall be judged according to what we have done in the body (c), and the wicked be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (d); falling into misery great as their crimes, and from which there is no redemption (e), no hope of rising again to virtue and happiness (f). Though under the gospel, men believe this life to be their only time of trial, yet how negligent of their eternal interests, how vitious are the most? How great then would be their security and negligence, if they could freely indulge themselves with the hope, that should they act their part ill here to the end, they might retrieve all in a following state? Delays to an uncertain futurity, and the hope of repenting hereafter, ruin the most now; what then would be the consequence, if these hopes were rendered reasonable by the belief they were to be tried again in another state?

Let us next consider their prospect of future happiness: what a low encouragement to struggle with contrary inclinations and habits, violent temptations and an opposing world, which necessarily render our virtue very imperfect, is this belief, that we shall indeed be more happily situated in a future state, but not arrive at compleat and unchangeable happiness till, after a long time, and repeated trials, we have attained a compleat virtue? What a low encouragement is this to creatures surrounded with so many difficulties and temptations, in comparison of the glorious assurances of the gospel? That if we approve ourselves faithful during this moment of trial, if we act well our part during this short life, labour, and trial, and danger, and imperfection shall then be no more; but we shall be confirmed in holiness and happiness, never more to be in danger of sinning or suffering. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (g). The righteous shall go into life eternal (h).* And in the next state,

(a) 2 Cor. vi. 2.

(b) Heb. ix. 27.

(c) 2 Cor. v. 10.

(d) 2 Thess. i. 9.

(e) Matt. xxv. 46.

(f) Luke xvi. 26.

(g) Matt. v. 8.

(h) Chap. xxv. 46.

that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part be done away (i). An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, is reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the mighty power of God, through faith unto salvation (k). These divine encouragements are only to be had from revelation. Reason could not assure us, that the imperfect virtue of a moment should be rewarded with perfect and everlasting happiness, but would rather direct us to fear the contrary. God is a free master of his unmerited favours, and in what degrees he will confer them, can with certainty be learned only from himself. 'Tis to Jesus therefore, the light of life, we are indebted for the promise of glory, honour, and immortality, since eternal life is the gift of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ (l). How should this endear the gospel to us, confirm us in the belief and profession of it, and excite to an answerable conduct? How should it animate us to press on to the noblest heights of piety and goodness, since our purity, our reward, and our happiness throughout eternity, will be proportionable to the degrees of goodness we reach in the present state?

VII. To the gospel alone, or to Christ as the light of life, we owe the discovery of this important part of our future blessedness, that our struggle with the fleshly inclinations, and keeping the body subject to the mind, shall be rewarded with the soul's receiving, at the resurrection, a body spiritual, glorious, powerful, and immortal; which shall be in a far greater degree subservient to our holiness and happiness to eternity, than it was in its present animal state an hindrance to both. The temptations of the flesh are the most powerful, with the generality, in the present life; because its inclinations are most violent, and its pleasures most affecting: they can hardly conceive of any happiness wherein the body is not some way interested, are apt to imagine it the most essential part of their compo-

(i) 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

(k) 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

(l) Rom. vi. 23.

tion,

tion, and sacrifice the calmer, purer delights of knowledge, devotion, goodness, and friendship, to the more gross and tumultuous pleasures of sense : and this is the source of most of the wickedness in the world. What an advantage therefore to the cause of virtue, and what an encouragement to keep under the body, and to regulate the gratifications of sense in a constant subordination to the purity, perfection, and happiness of the mind, is this assurance we have from the gospel, that if we thus mortify our bodies now, we shall be recompensed in *kind* as well as *degree* ; receiving, at the resurrection, bodies for ever exempt from all the infirmities, sicknesses and sufferings of our present mortal ones, as well as from their irregular inclinations : bodies that, by the pleasures of sight, harmony, beauty, and perfect activity, shall contribute in a far higher degree to the joy and perfection of the mind, than the greatest sensual enjoyments now do to our satisfaction (*m*) ; or the greatest bodily sufferings, for the cause of religion, to our uneasiness (*n*) ? This is an encouragement which grosser minds are capable of apprehending, and being influenced by immortal health, beauty, and vigour, the most glorious scenes to entertain the sight and imagination, and celestial harmony to ravish the ear. This doctrine of the resurrection of our bodies, free from all their present evils and imperfections to glory, beauty, and immortality, is peculiar to the gospel ; human reason could not discover it, though it assents to its truth on the declaration and promise of God, and the sensible proof of its certainty and desirableness in the resurrection and glory of our Saviour. The antient philosophers thought a resurrection impossible, or undesirable ; but herein they erred, not knowing the scriptures, and the power of God. God hath expressly promised it to us : he can as easily raise the body again as he made it at first ; and when it is raised with the glorious qualities described in the *New Testament*, a re-union

(*m*) Rom. viii. 18.

(*n*) 2 Cor. iv. 14---18.

with

with it will be as advantageous to the soul, as an everlasting union with it in its present state would be unhappy. The fifteenth chapter therefore of the first epistle to the *Corinthians*, is of vast more service to the bulk of mankind, to animate them against all difficulties from the fleshly principle, and by every sacrifice to approve their love to virtue and goodness, than volumes of the philosophers.

VIII. The separating a seventh day for the public worship of God, and a more intire application to the study and practice of religion, is another very valuable part of the Christian revelation; by rendering the knowledge and obligation of which universal, our Saviour was a *light of the world*. Reason informs us that God, who is the author and preserver of life, the God of our time, hath a right to be immediately honoured, at least, with a part of it: that public worship is a duty obliging all, being necessary to preserve among mankind an habitual conviction of the divine providence, government and right in us, and the reverence of the Deity; being a fit acknowledgment that we are *in common* indebted to God, and dependant on him for innumerable blessings in society; and the best method for pious and reasonable men, who preserve an habitual regard and gratitude to the Deity, to communicate these to others, and thereby promote their virtue, perfection, and happiness; the concern and duty of all as reasonable, social, and benevolent Beings, and the common offspring of God: and if public worship be a duty, 'tis necessary there be a time fixed for it, in order to the joint performance. And reason, if attended to, will farther instruct us, that beings capable of virtue, devotion, and intellectual pleasure, inclosed in bodies of flesh, and situated in a world filled with sensual amusements, diversions and temptations, by which the mind is greatly hindered from applying to its proper employments and pleasures, those great truths and duties which are its perfection

fection and happiness, reason will instruct us that such beings, besides an habitual regard to the Deity in their general conduct, and the daily exercises of devotion which support and express it, should at proper seasons *retreat farther* from the amusements, distractions, and cares of the world, in order to revive and fix deeper the impressions of the great principles, rules and motives of piety and virtue, and to dispose the mind for the enjoyment of a spiritual happiness in a future state; to lessen the influence of this world, and make an habitual piety and virtue more easy and practicable. So far reason speaks clearly, for, informing us the end is necessary to be attained, it obliges to use the means best subservient to it; but then, what that proportion of time exactly is, which is best for answering these ends, reason cannot readily decide, much less with such a clearness and certainty, as should oblige and determine all to comply, which yet is necessary for the full beauty and order of public social worship; for engaging the most inconsiderate and stupid to attend it for their improvement, and to prevent that disturbance and confusion which would arise, from one part of the society being wholly engaged in worldly pursuits, while the other was employed in the worship of the Deity. On these accounts, it appears worthy the divine wisdom to appoint that proportion of time it saw best fitted to answer the purposes of religion, a proportion that would not break in on the necessary cares and labours of life, nor yet return so seldom as in a manner to lose its efficacy, and leave mankind under the dominion of the cares and pleasures of the bodily life. Besides, the divine goodness might incline him to such an appointment, in compassion to the poorer and more dependant part of mankind, and to the beasts our servants, whose hard or covetous masters might not otherwise, in innumerable cases, allow them proper ease and refreshment. From the beginning of the world therefore, God set apart a
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seventh day for this end (*o*), whereon ceasing from the laborious employments of life, and from cares and pursuits merely animal, we should employ ourselves in the contemplation and acknowledgements of his perfections and works who created us and the world, is our preserver and constant benefactor, and our absolute proprietor; whose will is our law, his favour our happiness, who can only be pleased by an imitation of his perfections, by real virtue and goodness, and who will most bountifully reward, in a future life, those dispositions and their proper fruits. This institution was as early as the first man, as we learn from the history of *Genesis*, and the remains of ancient history and customs among the Heathen (*p*) confirm this account of *Moses*. For among all, even the most barbarous nations, they paid a particular regard to the seventh day (though in time they seem to have forgotten the reason of the institution) and as a consequence generally divided their time by weeks. This command was renewed to the *Israelites* in the Desert (*q*), and a great strictness farther enjoined, in abstaining from every kind of work, in memory of their deliverance from the servile labours and bondage of *Egypt*. But setting aside this peculiar reason, and what was added to the command on account of it, the *general reason*, and *original appointment* still oblige all: together with the command of Christ signified by his apostles, who, to add to the commemoration of the works of creation and providence, the commemoration of our redemption by Christ, and preserve the conviction of the most glorious evidence of our religion and assurance of immortality, the resurrection of Jesus (*r*), changed the seventh day for the first (*s*), which is also thought by learned men to have been the day held sacred from the beginning of the world, till the giving

(*o*) Gen. ii. 2, and 3. (*p*) See Grot. de Veritate, &c. l. i. c. 16.
 (*q*) Exod. xx. 8. Deut. v. 15. (*r*) Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2.
 Rev. i. 10. (*s*) V. Justin. Mart. Apol. ii. p. 98. Cypr. Epist.
 xxxiii. Tertull. Apol. c. xvi. and Ignat. Epist. ad Magnes, p. 35.

that law afresh in the wilderness (*t*). No one who hath a just sense of religion, and concern for his own virtue, perfection and happiness, and the virtue and happiness of others, can doubt the wisdom and goodness of this appointment; and every such person will be taught, both from reason and revelation, his obligation to employ this day in the manner that may best answer the ends of its separation; will, by his attendance, influence, and the like, encourage public worship, to spread among others a sense of religion, as well as cherish it in himself: and so employ his retirement as may best revive and confirm good dispositions; raise him farthest above the attraction of the present world, and the hindrances of virtue, and most strongly impress his mind with an approaching eternity, and temper his soul to its happiness. In short, he will see his obligations to improve the day to the purposes of religion, with a diligence and fidelity becoming one who knows his stay in this life is very short, his interests in a future state infinite, and, that his only important concern in the present life is, to cultivate those pious and virtuous dispositions which prepare him for the refined pleasures of immortality, and intitle him to the possession of them in the fullest degree. Had men been left to fix this proportion of time, superstition, in some few, might have incroached too far on the necessary business of life; and, with the greater part, indifference to religion, earthliness, or sensuality, have prevailed to allow a portion much too small. No one can say a seventh is too large; and God having fixed on this, his authority is sufficient to decide the point with all who have a just sense of the Deity, and their obligations to him, and a suitable value for his favour, and for that happiness in the perfection of devotion and goodness to which he designs to raise them.

IX. The *positive institution* of the Christian religion; viz. *Baptism* and the *Lord's supper*, are worthy

(*t*) Vide Patrick on Exod. c. xvi. v. 5.

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the wisdom and goodness of God, tend to cherish real piety and virtue, and are fit to be enjoined by him who stiled himself *the light of the world*. By some *sensible* public actions to declare our *inward* conviction of religion to the honour of God, and the edification of men, and by some public rites, at set seasons, to preserve the memory of *great transactions*, which have a tendency, when remembered, to excite and confirm our piety and virtue, is certainly a proper and reasonable part of religion. And as mankind are more affected with sensible things, than things merely rational and spiritual, to make use of sensible rites so far as they are adapted to *help* this *weakness*, and *remove* it, *not* to *strengthen* the prejudice, and *increase* the dominion of sense, is certainly a method worthy of God. It hath been the weak side of mankind in all ages, to incline too much to these rites; and their religion hath, for the most part, been made up of mere outside ceremonies, and pompous or superstitious services, which they have placed in the room of inward genuine piety, and real goodness. The greater ease in performing some of these, or their agreeably amusing the senses, exciting more powerfully a sensible warmth in religion, or their being consistent with the full indulgence of favourite passions: these, and some other reasons, have caused the herd of mankind readily to run into them, with the neglect or gross corruption of true religion. So strong, and general, and fixed, was this bias in mankind, that in condescension to this state of the world, and the weakness of the *Israelites*, whom otherwise the pompous worship of their idolatrous neighbours, would have seduced to *their* idolatry, God saw it necessary to enjoin them numerous pompous ceremonies and bodily services, which *in themselves were not good*, and to which nothing but the circumstances of the world, at that time, and the necessity of this method, for accomplishing more valuable ends, (the maintaining the knowledge of the true God and true Religion in the world) could have reconciled

conciled him. It is our happiness under the gospel, that our religion consists of actions in themselves reasonable and excellent, conducive immediately to the perfection of our nature, the present happiness of men, or the enlarging our capacities for future blessedness. The *positive* institutions of Christianity are few, but *two* properly such, and these plain and simple, no way tending to encourage superstition; and adapted to put us in continual remembrance of our obligations to real goodness.

As for the *sacrament of baptism*, wherein, by being washed with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*u*), the baptised person solemnly gives up himself to God through his Son, to be governed by the gospel he taught, in expectation of the aids of that spirit, whose miraculous gifts proved the truth of the gospel; and obliges himself to forsake all his former impurities, which he thus acknowledges (*w*); while at the same time, by this rite, he is encouraged to hope for God's pardoning mercy through Christ, and the cleansing influences of the spirit, it is certainly a suitable and reasonable institution. Is it not fit a person coming over from false religions, or vicious practices, should publicly renounce them; and with seriousness and solemnity oblige himself to newness of life? And is not this rite very expressive of this, well adapted to remind him of the necessity of inward purity, and very encouraging also, since, as administered by the appointment, and by the servant of God, it is a pledge to him of God's pardoning mercy and sanctifying spirit, if he comes to it with the proper dispositions (*x*).

As to the baptizing the children of Christian parents in their infancy; it is an action *in itself reasonable and fit*, that parents should dedicate their children to God, the former of their bodies, and the father of their spirits, in acknowledgment they have received them

(*u*) Matt. 19, 20. 1 Pet. iii. 21. (*w*) Rom. vi. 2, and following.
(*x*) Acts ii. 38. Titus iii. 5.

from him, and solemnly oblige themselves to endeavour the training them up in a religious and virtuous life. And it is a great *encouragement* to them, that God will accept the dedication, and by the influences of his spirit bless and succeed their endeavours (y): all which is fitly expressed by this external rite.

The wisdom of the other positive institution, the Lord's supper, is also easily shewn. It was in itself *reasonable*, and highly expedient for valuable ends which are served by it, that so great a transaction as the death of the Son of God, should be kept in constant lively remembrance. The breaking the bread, and pouring out the wine (z), help us more strongly to apprehend his sufferings, from his broken body and streaming blood; and the frequent eating and drinking after this manner, in memory of his death, tend to excite and confirm our faith in his gospel he thus attested; our love and gratitude to God and the redeemer; our abhorrence of sin, which he died to put away; a just contempt of the world, its honours or pleasures, in comparison of the honour of God, and the good of mankind; a fervent love to each other for whom the same common Saviour died; a concern to press on to the perfection of holiness, and reach heights of it worthy the expence of his death; and the like. This action is so well adapted to serve all these purposes, that it can *hardly* be called a *mere positive* institution; and these are of so great importance in the divine life, as to evidence it a most wise and gracious institution of our Saviour. While therefore we admire his wisdom and goodness, in releasing us from the bondage of *Jewish* ceremonies, and bodily observances, which could not perfect the worshippers, as pertaining to the conscience, and directing us to give our main concern to the important duties of *the love of God, and our neighbour* (a), and the like, we have reason also to be thankful for those positive institutions,

(y) Mark x. 13--16. Acts xvi. 15, 33. (z) Matt. xxvi. 26, &c. (a) Matt. xxii. 37.

so well adapted for answering these ends, the solemn profession of Christianity, and taking on ourselves, with proper encouragements, the obligations to a good life, or the calling to our lively remembrance the great motives to a continual progress in holiness, which the example, sufferings, and dying love of the Redeemer, exhibit.

X. The institution of the ministry, or an order of men whose peculiar business is to perform, in the best manner, the public offices of religion, to study more thoroughly its great truths and rules, to represent them in the clearest and most affecting light to others, and continually excite them to believe and practise accordingly, is a wise and excellent part of the Christian revelation; and by this Jesus provided for enlightning the *world throughout all generations (b)*. The advantage of this institution is so evident, that I need say little to illustrate it. If public worship be a duty, there must be some persons appointed to perform the public parts of it; and as the performing these in the best manner, is of great importance to the purposes of religion, and requires prudence, care, and study, it is fit persons be chosen, whose business it should be to qualify themselves for it. Farther: such are the circumstances of mankind; their ignorance, inattention, prejudices, engagement in worldly affairs, corrupt passions, and the like, as render it highly expedient and necessary there be an order of men qualified for the work, who should devote themselves to it; to instruct their ignorance, help their weakness, oppose their corruptions, rouse their attention to their duty, and assist and encourage them to the practice. And had the ministers of the gospel generally taken care to be duly qualified for their proper employment, kept close to it, and diligently discharged it, their greatest enemies must have esteemed them, and owned the usefulness of their office. And it is easy to observe,

(b) Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. 2 Tim. ii. 2.

that all the clamours against them bear wholly, either on their unfitness for their work, their departing from the design of their institution, or neglecting it; or else assuming a power Christ never gave them, to lord it over the faith and consciences of the people, and making use of the venerable name of religion to serve their views of ambition, covetousness, or sensuality; but these are men the gospel disowns, and whom no Christian is concerned to vindicate. It is only an order of *faithful men, fit to teach others*, and examples to the believers, in *humility, temperance, meekness, fidelity, goodness, charity, and purity*, and imitators of their divine master (*c*), that we contend for, as appointed by Christ. In the ages of Heathenism, the priests wholly neglected morality and true religion, and only taught the people superstition, and such observances as supported their power and increased their riches (*d*). The philosophers indeed taught virtue, some of them, but then at most they were but few in number (*e*); separated virtue from religion; wanted authority, supported by miracles, to establish their philosophy in the world; had but few hearers, a select number of friends and admirers, and, by allowing and recommending conformity to the religion established (*f*), left the bulk of mankind, under the power of idolatry, superstition, and priestcraft, as ignorant and vicious as ever. It was therefore wisely ordered by our Saviour, that his followers should not only stately assemble, for the profession of his religion, and the public worship of God in his name, but that there should be in every church or Christian assembly, one, at least, whose office it was to study religion more exactly, and to instruct and exhort others. For

(*c*) Tit. i. 6, &c. 1 Tim. iii. 1, &c. iv. 12.

(*d*) See Lactant. Instit. Div. l. iv. c. 3.

(*e*) Aristotle, particularly in his Ethics ad Nicom. takes no notice of a God and a providence, and the duties owing to the Deity; and but once slightly mentions the approbation and favour of God, as an encouragement to virtue throughout that system.

(*f*) Socrates did so. See Xenop. de Mem. l. iv. c. 3. § xvi. & c. vi. § ii. Et Cicero de Leg. l. ii. Sect. xvi. & lxxxii.

tho' every man is bound, according to his leisure and abilities, to study religion, and in his station to promote the knowledge and practice of it among others, yet this would not supply the neglect of that thorough study, exact knowledge, and constant instruction and persuasion by particular persons, which are so necessary to the support and progress of true religion. If this were left unassigned to proper persons, what was every one's business would as usually be neglected by every one. In all other sciences, teachers have been found highly necessary to a tolerable degree of knowledge; and it is apparent, that the knowledge and virtue now subsisting in the Christian world, are very much owing to the faithful and honest part of the ministers of the gospel; as the guilt of most of the corruptions and superstitions now prevailing, must be owned to lie heavy on the wicked part of them; who have neglected or gone off from the great ends of their office, and prostituted religion, in itself the most sacred thing, to their own worldly interests, or the vices of mankind: and who, therefore, deserve to be disowned by all reasonable and honest men, as much as the other to be encouraged. *Julian*, the most crafty opposer of Christianity, was so sensible of the usefulness of this order (g), for spreading the knowledge and practice of Christianity, that among his other efforts to revive Paganism, he appointed philosophers in all the considerable towns, skilled both in the *Gentile* religion, and philosophy, for the public instruction of the people. But it would be an affront to the understanding of an audience, if I mention more arguments to prove, that a wise and faithful instructor and friend, and a good example, are of great advantage in the study and practice of religion and virtue.

I will here end the proof, that *Christ was the light of the world*; having shewn, in several important instances, that besides the doctrines and precepts of na-

(g) Vide Sozomen. Hist. Eccl. l. 5. c. 16.

tural religion, which are a great part of Christianity, the additional doctrines, precepts, and institutions of the gospel, are worthy of God, suited to the necessities of mankind, and greatly conducive to promote true religion and virtue in the world. To the instances mentioned I might have added others : as the account of the creation and deluge ; the history of God's providence and general government, and of his particular dispensations to private families and persons ; the examples of eminent piety and virtue recorded in scripture for our imitation, and of the contrary, for our warning ; the perfect beauty of religion and virtue in the life of Christ ; the obligations and encouragements from the dignity, condescension, example, resignation, piety and love of the Son of God, and from his exaltation and government of the world, the reward of his perfect obedience, to imitate him as nearly as possible ; the distinct account of the awful transactions of the last day, and the rational and inviting descriptions of the employments and happiness of heaven, and the like : but I omit them, to prevent running out to too great a length. Let me now ask, what we can desire more to constitute a revelation, credible and worthy of God, than that it contain all these moral truths, which the most impartial, diligent, and able reasoners could trace out, and which are of general concernment, with the addition of those noble truths, or wise institutions which may best revive, support, or advance true religion in the world, and which human reason could not discover ; and place all in an easy familiar light, for the instruction even of the meanest ? What less than divine wisdom and goodness could thus assist and bless erring mortals ? How readily should we embrace, how heartily espouse, and how stedfastly abide by this religion, when the external proofs that it came from God, are also as great as its internal excellency ? What evidence and strength of reason therefore, was there in
this

this address of his to a Roman emperor, that he might dispose him to a more favourable treatment of Christianity, *Apol.* 1. p. 66. " If therefore in many
" of our religious sentiments, we agree with those
" poets and philosophers, who are most esteemed by
" you, if we teach many truths in a nobler manner
" than they have done, and a great many of which
" they were ignorant, and if we alone give satisfac-
" tory proofs of all, why are we exposed to unjust
" hatred and persecution? With *Plato* we agree, that
" *all things were made by God, &c.*"

I shall now conclude this subject with two or three reflections.

1. Hence we may learn, what a *perfect agreement* there is between *reason* and *faith*. Some have foolishly, and others wickedly, opposed these to each other; and imagined they magnified their faith, and rendered it more meritorious, by a readiness to believe doctrines contrary to reason, which, instead of being an acceptable homage, to God, is an action fit only for mad men. True Christianity, you have seen, is perfectly agreeable to reason; its doctrines are all worthy of God, and perfective of human nature: and though some of them could not be discovered by reason, and others cannot be fully comprehended by it, yet none of them contradict it. Reason is the gift of God, and to degrade that, is to reproach the giver. It is the voice of God, as well as revelation, and God cannot contradict himself. It is on the testimony of reason, to the moral perfections and providence of God, we believe revelation; because reason tells us, there is an infinitely wise, holy, and good God, our creator and governor, who would not deceive us himself, nor suffer us to be necessarily deceived in matters of the greatest importance. Now if any revelation pretended to be divine, contradicted the evident dictates of reason, and told us they were not to be relied on, it

would destroy the very testimony on which we were to believe it, and leave us no principle to build the faith of it upon. As therefore true Christianity must be intirely agreeable to right reason, and hath been at large proved such, if any persons attempt to bring us over to their sentiments, by declaiming against reason, to exalt, as they pretend, faith, the only use we should make of it, is to conclude, that they have got an unreasonable faith of their own, and grossly mistake the Christian doctrine, not that Christianity itself is unreasonable. Nonsense and contradiction are no more justly venerable in religion than in common life; but the more solemn the more contemptible. *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, is commended for that he reasoned away the seeming contradiction in the divine revelation (*b*), before he acted upon it. *And religion*, says *St. Paul*, *is a reasonable service* (*i*); and indeed, were it unreasonable, it would not be fitly required by a wise God, from creatures whom he had made reasonable.

2. How thankful should we be to God, that *Christ, the light of the world*, hath shone upon us, and how firm in our adherence to his authority and guidance? Holiness and goodness are the perfection and happiness of reasonable beings; every advantage therefore, for improving these, especially such peculiar advantages as we have by the gospel, must be in the highest degree valuable, both in regard to present and future happiness. The more perfect our piety and virtue, the nobler our pleasures at present, arising from veneration, love, and confidence in God, and a sense of his favour; from conscious goodness, from a calm and security of mind proof against all external assaults, from well-governed passions, from the successful prosecution of the most valuable designs, those of our own immortal perfection and happiness, and of others,

(*b*) Heb. xi. 17, 19.

(*i*) Rom. xii. 1.

and

and from hopes still bright'ning of eternal glory and blessedness; and as the present pleasures will be noble, so the larger our interest in the divine favour, and the happiness of eternity. A most wise and holy God cannot but approve, and make us happy in proportion to our resemblance of himself in holiness and goodness. How advantageous therefore, for a rational fervent piety, the satisfying account the gospel gives of evil, moral and natural; the wise reasons of their permission, and the greater good and happiness that will result from it to all the sincerely good? and, how well adapted to inspire us with a cheerful confidence in God, who brings good out of evil; and to animate us to approve our virtue, and increase our happiness, by surmounting difficulties and temptations under the view and approbation of a most tender parent, and gracious sovereign? What better fitted, than the assurance of a particular providence, to raise us above every temptation to vice, and leave us nothing to be concerned for but to do our duty, please God, and practise goodness? What more proper to lead us to repentance, and encourage us to exert ourselves amidst a sense of our past sins, and the frailty of our state, than the assurance of a full remission for the past, and divine assistance for the future? And what better way to prevent our abusing those favours to an occasion of sin, than granting them through the death of Christ, our sacrifice? What stronger, what nobler inducement to act our part well, and improve the present life in the best manner, than the assurance that this is a final state of trial, and that the reward of the approved virtue of a short life will be a happiness divine and everlasting? How glorious the encouragement, to mortify the irregular inclinations of the fleshly part, the promise of raising our bodies glorious, spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal? and how well adapted to keep these great truths in view, and engage us to the remembrance and practice of virtues, essen-

tial to our immortal perfection and happiness, the institution of the sacraments, the Lord's day, and the ministry? What greater proofs of the divinity of his doctrine could Jesus give, than revealing truths, and establishing institutions so perfective of our natures, and assistant to our virtue and happiness? Could any other religion furnish more useful and important truths, and attended with stronger external evidences of being divinely revealed, we might do well in quitting the gospel, and cleaving to that: but if no such religion can be found, we shall act most unreasonably, if we forsake the belief and obedience of the gospel, unless it could be reasonable to forsake an unerring guide to eternal happiness; or we could reasonably prefer any other interest or pursuit before true goodness, the favour of the Almighty, and unchangeable everlasting blessedness. Let us then, with the warmest gratitude, own our obligations to God for ordering our birth and education in a land blessed with the pure beams of the gospel, and more diligently study its noble discoveries and excellent precepts; and this will necessarily lead us to the closest adherence to it. To conclude,

3. Let us endeavour to reach heights of piety and goodness worthy the peculiar advantages we enjoy by the gospel. Every advantage for superior attainments in religion, carries with it an obligation to a suitable improvement, and to *whom God hath given much*, of them he will ask the more (*k*). God, who knows the value of these advantages, and their improveableness, cannot but be displeased with us if we neglect to improve them. Every degree of vice will be rendered more criminal by the clearer light our duty is set in, and the more amiable representations of religion, and the mightier encouragements to goodness we are blessed withal. Instead therefore of valuing ourselves barely on having those advantages, and condemning

(*k*) Luke xii. 48.

the less happy Heathen who wants them, let us endeavour to act up to them : let us bear the evils of life with a fortitude and resignation becoming those who are assured they are designed for our good, and will, rightly improved, issue in our greatest happiness in a future state, and answerably improve them : let us struggle against the violence of our inclinations and passions with that chearfulness, resolution, and constancy, which becomes persons who know they were permitted as trials of our virtue ; and that by overcoming them we shall heighten our virtue, its acceptance with God, and our glory and happiness to eternity : let us make religion the great concern of life, and doing good our chief employment ; like men assured, that *if they seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all other things will be added unto them* (l). Let God's pardoning mercy manifested through Christ, lead us to repentance, and produce an irreconcilable abhorrence of vice, which caused the death of the Son of God : let the promise of divine assistance engage us to exert ourselves to the utmost, and to reach degrees of goodness worthy such an assistant and conductor : let us not lazily plead impotence, and decline our duty, when God promises his grace shall be sufficient for us (m). Let our knowledge, that the present is a final state of trial, determine us, in this our day, to mind the things that relate to our everlasting peace, *before they are for ever hid from our eyes* : and let us improve all the helps we enjoy from the *Lord's day*, the *sacrament*, and the *ministry*, like persons who must shortly account for these, and who know the best improvement of them, will procure the largest possession of a felicity divine and everlasting ; that the glory and beauty of our bodies at the resurrection, the perfection of our minds and our happiness, in the immediate presence of God and of his Son, and in the so-

(l) Matt. vi. 33.

(m) 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ciety of angels and saints, will be proportioned to the fervour of our piety, our activity in doing good, command of our passions, and abstinence from every instance of wickedness while on our trial: let us be *stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for as much as we know our labour is not in vain in the Lord (n).*

(n) 1 Cor. xv. 58.

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DISCOURSE XXII.

On the Example, and moral Character
of Christ.

[F O S T E R,]

I PET. ii. 21.

---*Leaving us an example, that ye should follow
his steps.*

THE examples of great and illustrious persons, who were eminent for superior degrees of moral goodness, and for the purity, strength, and sublimity of their virtues, have in almost all ages of the world been held in high veneration; and it has been thought of considerable *service* to the cause of *virtue*, as well as *respect* due to the memories of those who have excelled in it, to propose such uncommon, such noble and useful characters, as a proper *pattern* for the rest of mankind to imitate. And for this there is an evident foundation in *reason*, and in the frame of *human nature*. For it is undeniable from experience, that the *force* of good examples is much more universally felt, than that of the wisest precepts, or the most exact and accurate reasonings: they not only *instruct* but powerfully *persuade*; they excite *admiration*, inspire *resolution*, work upon the inward *native* sense of *ingenuity*, and charm and animate it to *exalted* and *divine* improvements. Were we to have the most elaborate draught of moral excellence

cellence presented to us in *speculation* only, we should be apt to esteem it as a *fine picture*, and be struck, perhaps, with the *beauties* and *graces* of it; but might think it, at the same time, wrought up to a *romantic strain*, and too *sublime* to be copied in real life. But when we see it as it were *substantiated*, and are fully convinced that it has been actually exhibited in *living* characters, the ground of *despondency* and *inactivity* is removed; a worthy *emulation* is excited; and we ourselves are not only *prompted*, but *encouraged* to excel.

As for the example which the text speaks of, and which Christianity has called us to imitate, it is by far the most *high* and *noble* that was ever proposed to the world: as the person who set it was, both in *office* and original dignity, the *first* and *chief* of men; being indeed, before his incarnation, at the head of all the *angelical* powers; and voluntarily condescending to assume *our nature*, for this among several other most wise and gracious purposes, that he might go before us as our *pattern* and *conductor* in the paths of virtue and piety. And the example of Christ contains more *ample instruction* in it than any other, and is adapted to all *ranks* and *stations* in human life, as it abounds both with *common* and *universal*, and with more *extraordinary* and *heroic* virtues; it is an example of *unspotted innocence*, and therefore, when rightly understood, an unerring invariable *rule*: and finally it is an example that is peculiarly *persuasive*, calculated to impress our minds, and determine and influence our conduct—being that of the *author* of our religion, of our amiable and compassionate *Saviour*, of the greatest *benefactor* and friend to mankind. We ought therefore, though we can never hope to conform *perfectly* to it, to aim at as near a *resemblance* of it as is possible, from every motive of *decency*, *gratitude*, and *interest*. “By this we shall adorn the *Christian name*, “render it glorious, and the object of delight and “*reverence*; whereas, when it is debased and sullied “by *vice*, by a *low irregular brutal* life quite the re-

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“verse of the pure and sublime life of Christ, it is a
“vain and insignificant distinction in itself, the jest of the
“licentious and prophane, and the scorn of the sober
“infidel.”

But then, on the other hand, it must be remember'd, that there are certain *general rules* necessary to be observed in the imitation of *all* examples; and especially of *such* as transcend common life, and are adorned and heighten'd by *great* and *extraordinary* actions.—It is absolutely necessary, in the *first* place, in order to our forming a just estimate of *particular actions*, that we carefully examine into the true *springs* and *occasions* of them, and consider the *situation* and *character* of the agent, and the *views* and *motives* by which he was directed and governed; because without this it is impossible for us to know, in several cases at least, whether they actually *deserve* and demand our imitation, or, indeed, whether they are *right* and *fit* in themselves. The very *same instances* of outward conduct, as they are differently *circumstanced*, and flow from different *principles*, may be either eminently wise, or as notoriously *absurd*; *moral* or *irregular*; proofs of a rational and sober *piety*; or marks of a heated and blind *enthusiasm*. And, therefore, unless this point be fixed with a tolerable degree of exactness and good judgment, we may happen entirely to *desert*, or however widely to *vary from*, the *pattern* which we pretend most strictly to copy after, even when the *external behaviour* is, in both, the same.

From hence we are naturally led to another rule, and that is, that in following examples which are proposed to us, and most of all *distinguished* and *singular* examples, we endeavour to find out *those parts* which are more immediately *adapted* to our own condition, to our abilities, rank, and employments, and the relative stations, in which the all-wise providence of the supreme disposing mind has thought fit to place us. For besides *those* virtues which are immutably and universally *essential* to a good character, and such as are directly

directly *suit*ed to the peculiar relations which we ourselves sustain, we shall probably, upon reflection, find some *other* parts, to which we are not *capable* of attaining: and to attempt *these* may be as injurious and unbecoming, as the discharging our *proper* obligations, and the duties of religion that bind *invariably* in *all* circumstances; is beneficial and praise-worthy. And as it will, I believe, plainly appear, if we consider the subject impartially, that these *peculiarities* relate not, in most cases, to the *habit* and inward *temper* of piety and moral rectitude, but chiefly to the outward *expressions* and *demonstrations* of it; it must upon this account be highly *expedient* for us, with respect to such shining examples as we find within us a generous and aspiring *emulation* to resemble, to make a distinction between the *general character*, and the *particular actions* that illustrate and display that character. For the *latter* may be *extraordinary* instances above our capacity, and too *sublime* for vulgar imitation; while the *former* is of such a kind, as *every man* has it in his *power* to cultivate, and carry to a considerable degree of perfection. And this remark is not confined to *entire characters*, but may be extended to all the *single virtues* of which they are composed; by whose *united* lustre and influence it is, that they are *completely* formed, and rendered *amiable* and *resplendent* patterns of moral beauty and dignity.—Thus the *habit* and *temper* of piety, of generosity, of benevolence and mercy, may be *imitable* in *all* examples, be they ever so great and excellent; but it is obvious to the common sense and experience of mankind, that there are *some acts* of piety, *some expressions* of benevolence, *some discoveries* and *proofs* of a *generous* and merciful disposition, that cannot be *universally* imitated: so that the *inward*, i. e. the *true* and *proper*, character may be *one* and the *same*; even when there is a necessity, in the nature of things, that it should *shew* itself in very *different* instances. And this can never appear in a stronger light, than by applying it to the
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most *holy* and *finished* example of the blessed author of our religion. To endeavour to be *like* him in a constant and ardent *propensity* to do good, and in a *life* of the most exalted and extensive usefulness, is the *eternal duty* of *all* his disciples; but to *perform* precisely the *same* beneficent actions, to communicate relief and happiness, to reform the errors and vices of the world, in the *same extraordinary* way in which he did it, these things can constitute *no part* of *our* moral obligations, because they are in our present circumstances absolutely *impossible*. And, in many other cases, unless we take care to maintain the *like* just *distinction*, and, by that means, acquire a right notion of *what it is* we are obliged to copy, in the pious and moral example of our adorable Saviour, our religion must run into *extravagance*; and our virtues, instead of being reasonable and attractive, will be justly censured as absurd and unnatural *affectation*.

I shall only add one preliminary observation more, which is this, that the most bright and justly celebrated examples of virtue are likely to make the most *sensible* and *deep* impression, when they are *distinctly* illustrated. The *general* excellence, of the *whole* character taken together, may appear *great* and *admirable*; but our esteem and veneration of it will of course *increase* and be better *established*, when we see it represented in a *variety* of agreeable lights; and the *uses* of it will be *accommodated*, with less danger of error and greater ease, to the *various* scenes and conditions of human life. For as in our *inquiries* into the works of nature, the *farther* we go in unravelling the curious texture of their parts, their properties and uses, their stupendous form as branches of the general system, their connection with and dependence on each other, and subserviency to the common grand design of order, harmony, and the communication of happiness; as, I say, the more *exact* we are in these *inquiries*, our *wonder* and *delight* are greatly heightened, and the more *enlarged idea* we have of the exquisite constitution

tion of the universe, and the boundless perfection of its infinite author: so it is likewise with respect to *moral example*. The consideration of their *general propriety* and *rectitude* is but an inadequate and superficial view, in comparison of that which must be opened to us, by a distinct display of their *particular beauties* and *excellencies*—I shall therefore pursue this method in the following discourse, and endeavour, with reverence and humble admiration, to delineate the several perfections that were eminently exemplified in the life of Christ; not presuming that I shall be able to do *strict justice* to the fair and unspotted original; but hoping, however, to give such a *transcript* of it, as may be adapted to warm our more *refined* and *generous* affections, to inspire an *honourable opinion* of Christ and his religion, a *love* of virtue for its intrinsic divine excellence, and more *vigorous resolutions* to improve in it.

The *first* thing, that I shall propose, is the example of our blessed Saviour's *piety*; "which was indeed *sublime* and *fervent*, but yet, in all the expressions of it, *discreet* and *temperate*; being founded in reason and the immutable law of all derived and dependent natures, and entirely *regulated* and *guided* by it." I chuse to begin with *this*, because it shone so brightly, and with such a superior and excelling lustre, in the life of Christ, and appears to have been, as it were, the *vital* and *animating* principle throughout his whole character; and because it is, in itself, the *first* and *supreme* obligation incumbent on *mankind*, and on all *intelligent* and *moral* creatures.---In the opinion of many indeed, who would be ranked with the most *discerning*, piety seems not to be a *necessary ingredient* in great and exemplary characters. In some of the most *applauded*, especially in *modern* times, there are found but *few* and *slight* traces of it. And yet I can, I think, scarce conceive of any truth, that is more demonstrable and obvious to human reason than this, that there can be no such thing as a strictly *moral*,
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and surely then not a *finished* character, while the duties of *piety* are entirely neglected. It may indeed have a *partial* dignity, and be justly celebrated for its *other* distinguished and useful qualities; but the want of *this* is so fundamental a defect, that it must, at least, *tarnish* and *obscure* all the rest of its boasted excellencies.---For is it *natural* to the mind of man to acknowledge and honour real merit, and cannot refuse to adore *infinite rectitude*? Can it sincerely admire *lower characters* of virtue, and not be charmed with that of the *best* of all beings? Can it love, and be struck with, a *confined* and *defective* goodness, and not find its contemplations *raised*, and its affections *warmly excited*, by a goodness that is *unbounded* and *immutable*? Can it approve of *gratitude*, and not be *grateful* to the eternal source of mercy? Such a conduct as this must fail in *essential* points; and has neither *fitness* nor *consistency* to recommend it. For the duties of *piety* are, properly speaking, nothing else but the exercise of *respect*, *love*, and *gratitude* to the supreme Being; which, if they are *moral* and *unalterable* obligations with respect to our *fellow creatures*, must deserve, *much more*, to be improved and cultivated with respect to him, who is the *gracious* and *universal creator*. This therefore is the natural, the inevitable, conclusion from the whole---that it is altogether as impossible, in *reason*, that there should ever be a truly *noble* and *complete* character without lively sentiments of *devotion* and *piety* towards God; as it is that any character should be *amiable*, without *justice*, *clemency*, and *generosity* to men.

But *both these*, which are in the nature of things inseparably linked together, were *illustriously* displayed in our blessed Saviour's example: and it was this *union*, and admirable *harmony*, of all the moral virtues, which give it such a transcendent and incomparable glory, that all other examples sink and fade before it. This perfect pattern of all moral rectitude ever maintained and cultivated the most *raised* and *honourable* apprehensions of God, and lived in an *habitual reverence* of his underived and independent glory and majesty, his

boundless dominion, his supreme authority; and under an *efficacious* and *invigorating* sense of his own constant dependence upon him. "The *piety* of the Saviour of the World was *free* and *generous*; not a homage paid to a *tyrant*, but to the *father* and *friend* of mankind." It appears to have been a *steady* and *uniform* principle, from all his discourses; from his frequent *occasional* addresses to the Deity in prayer and praise; as well as from his more *uncommon* and *intense* devotions. He gave continual and daily proofs of an ardent zeal for the *honour* of God; or, in other words, "for promoting the right knowledge of his *perfections* and *laws*, and an exact and *universal resemblance* of him." He thought it his *meat* to do the will of him that sent him into the world, and to finish his work; i. e. "it was the *refreshment*, the *delight*, of his mind, infinitely superior to the false adulterate gratifications of sensual excess and luxury, to support honourably his *place* and *rank* in the universe, and execute the *orders* of infinite wisdom." And being convinced, that it was necessarily determined by the *best* and most *important* reasons, he ever preserved that *calm*, *humble*, and *sublimely rational* temper as to be able to say; "I not only esteem myself *constrained* by the *duty* which I owe to a *superior*, but I *delight* to do thy will, O my *God*." A very illustrious instance of his command over mutinous and rebellious passions, we find in the last and most *distressful* scene of his life. For though *nature* was shocked, and expressed a strong reluctance, at the prospect of undeserved scorn and indignity, and of the shame, tortures, and horrors of a violent and ignominious death; yet he still preserved his *constancy*, and *invincible temper* of *resignation*: O my Father, says he, *if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*.

But perhaps it will be thought, that the *agony* and *consternation*, under which our Saviour laboured, and by which he was so much *oppressed*, is very surprising and

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and unaccountable, considering the *greatness* of his person and the unblemished *innocence* of his life. This, it may be said, was surely a *weakness* in him, and a *dishonour* to his character; since many *common* men have met *death*, in all its forms of terror, not only without that *confusion*, and *disconsolate anxiety* of mind, which he expressed, but with an *intrepid* and *invincible resolution*.—To which it is obvious to reply, that this *dejectedness* and *distress* of mind, which is thought so strange and wonderful, and, in some measure, disgraceful to the character of Christ, “might arise “from a *conjunction* of several circumstances, which “produced the effect *mechanically*; without any, the “least, reflection on his *moral example*.” It may be presumed to have sprang, very much, from *natural constitution* of *body*; nor is this, at all, an *absurd* and *foreign* supposition, when we are expressly told that, as a man, he *was in all things made like unto his brethren*; and, of consequence, must have been necessarily exposed to the general *infirmities* and *temptations*, which attend human nature. And this *constitutional* disposition, subject to strong impressions of *fear*, might perhaps be aided and strengthened by his reflecting on—the *ill success* of his heavenly mission; the *stubborn* and almost *desperate* incredulity of the *Jewish* nation; their *ingratitude* in offering such heinous indignity to him, whose life had been one continued scene of *beneficence*, of a noble *concern* and *effort* to promote their highest interest: and, consequently, the distress of his mind (which, increasing the *inbred aversion* of human nature to a violent and disgraceful death, produced his most *stupendous* agony,) might spring in a great measure from *the love* of his *country*, and a tender *compassion* for its unhappy state. Others, again, suppose, that it might be occasioned, or at least heightened, by *præternatural* causes, and particularly, by the influence of evil ministers to disturb and terrify the *imagination*; upon which account, they think, it was, that good angels were sent from

heaven, after his virtue had *sustained* this *arduous* conflict, to *raise* and *comfort* him. But which way soever we determine about these things, most certain it is, that his *extraordinary* terror, at the apprehension of an ignominious and tormenting death, is so far from being an objection against the *strength* of his *piety*, that it is rather a more *full* and *bright* illustration of it: "For the *greater* his dread of death was, *proportionably greater* must the force of his *religious* *revelence* of God be, to controul and dispel it." And, perhaps, this dark scene might be wisely ordered, in the course of providence, with *this* among other views; "to give us an *unquestionable example* of the surprising effect of a rooted habitual piety, to *support* the mind in *extreme exigencies*, and render it *unconquerable* by the most *formidable trials*.—"

To conclude this head; the religious example, which Christ has in our own nature proposed and set before, "is an *easy* and *imitable* example, free from *unnatural* and *extravagant* raptures and transports. "It does not consist in *mechanical impulses* and *variable fervors* of devotion; in *superstitious austerities* and *enthusiastical visions* and *intercourses* with God; but "in worshipping the *Father* of the universe *in spirit* and *in truth*, with an *enlightened* understanding, and "a *serene* and *purified* conscience. The *fruits* of it "were—*zeal* regulated by *knowledge*, and tempered "with *humanity* and *compassion*; the practice of *virtue* "in all its branches; *humility*, *contentment*, *sobriety*, "the love of *mankind*, and a delight in *doing good*? "It was not *reserved* and *unsociable*, but familiar and "affable; and aimed at this as its *ultimate* end—to "promote the *glory* of the infinite creator by the *moral rectitude*, the private and public, the present and "eternal *happiness*, of his *intelligent*, which are the "noblest of his creatures."

I must crave your patience, while I suggest one instance more of our Saviour's *piety*, which I have not hitherto touched upon; but it ought by no means to

be omitted, because it will afford several pertinent and useful observations, directly suited to the state of *Christianity* in these present times. The author of our religion, while he conversed with men here on earth, was not only constant, at all fit seasons, in *meditation* and *private prayer*, but regularly and seriously attended the solemn offices of *public devotion*; and particularly it was, in his opinion, “an *essential* proof of “the respect due to Almighty God, to acknowledge “his authority in the appointment of *positive* laws, as “well as by a strict observation of those which are “*unchangeable* and *moral*.” It was upon *this* principle, that he thought himself obliged to submit to *John’s* baptism. And therefore when *John*, who was a minister of God far *inferior* and entirely *subservient* to him being commissioned only as a *preparatory* messenger, to open the way for the introduction of his mild and glorious reign, or as a *herald*, to proclaim to the *Jewish* nation the coming of their king; when *John*, I say, made a *scruple* of performing the office of baptism for one who was advanced so vastly above him; the Son of God, notwithstanding his *superior* character and the *consummate* rectitude of his nature, would not be *diverted* from discharging an *obligation* which he thought *indispensably* incumbent on him: For thus, says he, *it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*.

And what *excuses*, now, that are *plausible*, and carry the least distant colour of reason, can any of us invent, for *depreciating* and neglecting laws of the very *same* kind under the *Christian* institution, with *that* which our Lord himself so remarkably *honoured*, and hath in so forcible a manner recommended to our esteem and veneration, by *his own example*? “We shall not, “surely, pretend that the holy *rites* of our religion “are *signs* and *emblems*, that can be of *no use* but to “the *vulgar*, the weakness of whose reason must be “*aided*, and their affections *raised*, by *sensible* images; “but that we are too *wise*, and our notions of things “too *just* and *refined*, to receive any real improve-

“ment from such *debased* and *popular* ordinances;” we shall not, I say, think it *decent* to make *this* pretence; when we have his *example* and *authority* both directly against us, who was *the wisdom of God*. What then shall we offer? Is it this; “that we are “already so far *advanced* and *confirmed* in virtue, as to “stand in *no need* of any *external helps*?” Certain it is, that in such cases, our *partiality* and *pride* may easily deceive us; upon which account, it is our wisdom to be more *cautious* and *diffident*: but not to insist on this; it is evident to the very lowest understanding, that what is here suggested is a *frivolous* and *insufficient* plea, since the Saviour of the world did not think it to have *any weight* in *his own case*, though he was perfectly *innocent*. On the contrary, he looked upon an act of obedience, even to a *positive law*, to be absolutely necessary to *complete* his *moral character*; necessary to maintain a becoming *respect* to the authority of God; necessary as *an example* to instruct and influence others; and highly necessary to prevent *contempt* from being thrown on *any one* of the divine laws, which, by a too easy transition, would devolve upon *all the rest*. “For as every *act* of obedience, by “the established *constitution*, and the *laws* that take “place with respect to the human mind, must “strengthen the *habit* of obedience; so on the other “hand, according to the fixed and invariable progress “and course of *habits*, *repeated* instances of *disobedience*, “even to laws that are in their intention *inferior* and “*subordinate*, must directly lead to the same wrong “conduct in *grosser* and more *heinous* cases; and may “therefore, at length, by gradual advances, proceed “to an open violation, if not an avowed contempt, “of the *immutable duties* of *natural religion*, as well as “the *peculiar institutions* of *revealed*.”---In what I have said under this head, I must be supposed to address myself to *Christians* only; who will find themselves miserably embarrassed, if they endeavour to reconcile their *neglect* of plain and acknowledged precepts of the
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Christian religion, with the *principles* which they publicly profess, or with their maintaining a *consistent* and *honourable* character. Suffer me just to add, that as the *obligation* of *positive* duties derives itself, *entirely*, from the *will* of the supreme legislature *expressly* declared: it from hence necessarily follows, that the *primitive model* of institution, ought to be conscientiously and *strictly* adhered to. "To *annul* the law altogether, is a direct opposition to the authority of God; to *alter*, so far as the alteration extends, is the same as to *annul*:" So that no pretence of greater *propriety*, nor any plea of *inconvenience*, can ever justify our substituting a *human ordinance* (whether in *whole*, or in *part*) in the place of a *divine*. "There are circumstances to be supposed, in which the *observance* of it may, for a time at least, be *omitted*, with perfect innocence; but *none*, wherein, without gross arrogance and superstition, we can presume to *mend* it." The *reason* of the thing is clear and strong against all such *innovations*, as well as our Lord's *example*:—The excellencies of which will be more largely illustrated in my next discourse.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

On the Example and moral Character
of Christ.

[FOSTER.]

1 Pet. ii. 21.

-----*Leaving us an Example, that ye should follow his steps.*

PIETY, and universal virtue and good morality, are, by the natural connection and order of things, absolutely *inseparable*. For all the rules of moral goodness being eternal laws of God, and many of them transcribed, as it were, from his own *essential perfections*; the allowed and habitual neglect of any of them must, of necessity, be inconsistent both with the just esteem of his *lovely and excellent character*, and with a sincere regard and submission to his *authority*. Nor can it ever be imagined, without the most manifest absurdity, that the supreme *wisdom* of the infinite mind will think it *sufficient* for us to practise those *outward respects* and *honours*, which his matchless dignity, and the relation we stand in to him, demand from us, if we are, at the same time, careless about discharging *other duties*, which he has declared, to be equally *inviolable*, in the very contrivance and frame of our nature; or live in the omission of those *necessary offices* which must be of perpetual obli-

obligation, as long as the *various relations* continue to take place, *established* by his wisdom and power, and throughout all ages maintained between the several parts of his creation. Such a supposition as this would plainly infer, that the great and all-perfect Deity is in reality neither *perfect*, nor *truly great*; or in other words, that he is more concerned for the mere *pomp* of *supremacy*, and useleſs *compliments* offered to himſelf, than for rectitude of *temper*, or integrity of *moral conduct*; and that for the ſake of flattering praifes or ſervile addreſſes, he will *diſpenſe* with his own laws. But of all the *moral virtues*, there is none more intimately connected with the genuine ſpirit and proper duties of *piety*, than univerſal *benevolence* and *mercy*.---For if we reverence the authority of God, *that* has enjoined and enforced it upon us; if we honour his *example*, in *that* we find it moſt amiably and gloriouſly diſplayed; the *nature*, which *he* has given us, ſtrongly inclines and prompts us to it; and *his creatures*, whoſe happineſs he ſincerely deſires, are the *objects* of it.

From the conſideration of our Saviour's piety, we, therefore, naturally proceed to contemplate his *benevolence*, his *lively* and *unconquerable* benevolence. This is the virtue, that, above any other, conſtitutes *lovelineſs* of character; and it is, withal, the inſeparable *companion* of true greatneſs of mind. And, with reſpect to this generous and *God-like* virtue, the example of Chriſt deſerves a very particular *attention*, and to be admired and celebrated with the higheſt *applauſes*. It may be extremely ſerviceable for our direction, as to the excellent *nature*, the great *importance*, the immutable *neceſſity* of univerſal love and charity: it may likewise be peculiarly ſerviceable to *warm* and *animate* every *kind* and *friendly* affection, that *nature* hath implanted within us; to extirpate all the *ſeeds* of *baſe* and *ſelfiſh* paſſions; to inſpire a *diſintereſted*, *ſteddy*, *diffuſive*, goodneſs; and

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a generous unextinguishable *ardour* and *delight* in beneficent actions.

For, in the first place, our Lord has plainly shewn us, and represented it to us, in the strongest light, by several remarkable instances in his own life, "that the eternal observances and duties of *piety* ought, upon no occasions, to be suffered to interfere with the necessary offices of *humanity* to our fellow-creatures." He made no scruple of *helping* and *relieving* the distressed, and acting, *publicly*, the part of a *friend* and noble *benefactor* to mankind on the *sabbath-day*; tho' the prejudiced and SUPERSTITIOUS *Jews* had so far extinguished *the light of nature*, that they censured and condemned this conduct as a monstrous height of *propheaneness*, and an open violation of the express *command* and *law* of God relating to the *sabbath*. But the Son of God being infallibly assured, that his Father could not be more *honoured* than by *imitating* his most amiable perfections, and having his heart inflexibly intent on *doing good*, (which he knew was one main end of all *instituted* religion) chose rather to expose himself to the insolent scorn and persecutions of *ignorant bigots* and *designing hypocrites*, "than to raise to himself a false but *splendid*, character for *devotion* and *piety*, "by making a sacrifice to it of *humanity* and *mercy*." He saw it to be an eternal dictate of *nature*, as well as that it was expressly revealed by one of the ancient *Prophets*, that God would have *mercy* rather than *sacrifice*; and gave such other solid and undeniable proofs, of the *rectitude* and *honour* of his conduct, taken both from reason and scripture, that his adversaries were totally *confounded*; though at the same time, as it generally happens with thoroughly *perverse* and *incorrigible* tempers, their *prejudices* were *heightened*. So that throughout the whole of these transactions, of which several are distinctly mentioned in the Evangelical history, both the *wisdom* of Christ, and the exalted *goodness* and *generosity* of his disposition, are gloriously and with a *united lustre* exemplified.

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And if we review the particulars of our blessed Saviour's *benevolence*, we shall find it to be, in *all*, *noble* and truly *divine*. To do good was the constant *employment*, the principal *business*, of his life. His very *retirements*, his *meditations*, his *prayers* were in a great measure devoted to the most substantial happiness of mankind; but his *public converse*, with the world, was almost one intire scene of kind and useful offices. Wherever he appeared, *ease* and *joy* were his constant attendants. He recovered speech to the *dumb*, sight to the *blind*, the calm and regular use of reason to the *distempered in mind*; restored those to the *privileges* of *sociable* creatures, who, for *foul* and *loathsome diseases*, were excluded from human society; and relieved the *sorrows* of tender parents and affectionate relatives, by miraculously raising their *children* and *friends* from the dead. In a word, the far greater part even of his *extraordinary* operations were, like the *fixed* and *constant* temper and habit of his mind, friendly to all objects that presented themselves, and scattered the blessings of *health* and *peace* all around him—But great and godlike as all this may appear, the benevolence of Christ had a far *nobler* aim, and took a much *wider* and more *extended* scope. His *chief view* was to instruct the ignorant, and reform the erroneous and vicious, to establish truth, and promote universal virtue and rectitude of life; and, consequently, to advance the *supreme honour* and *endless felicity* of *reasonable* beings. For *this* he underwent innumerable *fatigues*; with a view to *this* he directed all his *studies*, and was fearless of *reproach* or *danger*; and at last, the more effectually to accomplish this *high* and *grand* design, he *freely*, and with an *heroic greatness* of mind, consented to submit to *death*. So that he may be properly said to have died a martyr for the *universal* good, the *supreme* and *everlasting* good, of mankind: “and thus, his benevolence which, in the former “parts of his life no *difficulties* could controul, no “*ingratitude* restrain, no *injuries* discourage, was ele-
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"vated to its utmost pitch of *perfection* by triumph-
"ing over the *ignominy* and *terror* of death."

And as, the most *humane* and *nobly benevolent* hearts, have always been distinguished by a strong sense of *compassion*, so we find it in the life of Christ; in which this tender and generous virtue was most admirably displayed. It is the property of *little* and *contracted* minds to be hard and insensible; but *great* spirits easily melt, and relent at the distresses of their fellow-creatures. To be softened by *benevolent* affections, and dissolved in *pity*, is an honour to the human mind, but to be dissolved by the effeminate pleasures of *luxury* is mere animal passion, that depresses reason and the moral faculties. The later of these therefore, could find no place in the perfect example of the Son of God; but the former was gloriously displayed, and shone in its utmost lustre. Compassion was so natural to his *elevated* and *divine* temper, that the most *common incidents* of life were sufficient to raise a strong and lively sense of it---And it exerted itself towards his most determined and inveterate *enemies*. For when, a little before the destruction of that blinded and ungrateful city, he beheld *Jerusalem* at a distance, we are informed by the sacred historian, that with the most sensible and deep concern he *deplored* her unhappy fate, and the desolation that would shortly be brought upon her by the *Roman* arms, as a punishment of her unbelief and impenitence.

Add to all this, that we find, in the life of Christ, a bright example of the tenderest affection and sympathy of *friendship*. For when the relations and friends of *Lazarus* were lamenting, and in fore affliction, at his death, his soul immediately took the *impression* of their grief, and *Jesus wept*: *Jesus wept*, though he knew their *loss* would soon be *repaired*, and though he came *determined* to repair it by his miraculous power.---*Jesus* therefore *wept* not for the death of *Lazarus*; but from a mind strongly *susceptible* of *compassion*, and that naturally bore a *part* in the *sighs* and *complaints* of

of the afflicted. "From whence we learn, that the
 " *soft heart* which easily relents, and the *tear* of com-
 " *miseration* that kindly falls for the distresses of others,
 " is one of the most infallible indications of a *sublime*
 " and *great* spirit, and an ornament to the most ex-
 " *alted* characters." There is indeed such an inward
satisfaction, such a consciousness of true *dignity* attend-
 ing it, as is not to be described. From *pains* of this
 kind springs one of the *noblest* of all our *pleasures*,---
 " So *wisely* and *graciously* has the God of nature or-
 " dained it, that the compunction and uneasiness,
 " which we feel from so *generous* a principle, should
 " not be *unmixed* sorrow; but be accompanied with
 " inward approbation and end in *joy*: that, whilst it
 " is in its *consequences* so highly *beneficial* to our fellow-
 " *creatures*, we *ourselves* might not be the only suffer-
 " ers by it; nor consequently be tempted to *discourage*
 " or *resist* that *implanted sense* of humanity, which is
 " the orphan's *hope*, and the *refuge* of the poor and
 " *miserable*."

Hitherto, then, the example of our blessed Saviour's
benevolence appears, in all the branches of it, to be
 extremely natural and beautiful; and to be built, not
 merely on instincts of *nature*, but on principles of
reason and *religion*. There is such a thing, no doubt,
 in many characters as an uncommon *constitutional* ten-
 derness and friendliness of disposition, and a *peculiar*
 degree of propensity to kind and generous actions:
 And this deserves to be highly valued as a signal privi-
 lege of nature. But to be swayed and governed by
 it, as we may be by any other *mechanical* impulse,
 without reflection, and the deliberate judgment and
 determination of the mind, seems to have, in a *mo-*
ral sense, very little that is truly praise-worthy in it.
 " For it is possible, in such cases as these, that a man
 " may be *humane* and *compassionate* only, or at least
 " chiefly, for *self-gatification*;" and his kind affec-
 tions, not being bounded and regulated by a *pre-*
siding intelligent and *moral* principle, may often-

times prompt him to communicate *private relief* and pleasure, against all rules of *discretion*, and in opposition to the *common* good. But when benevolence is directed by *reason*, springs from *approbation* and *choice*, and is cultivated as a *law* of the supreme Being, and on unalterable and most important branch of the *moral rectitude* of human nature; it then claims a *rank* among the most shining and eminent virtues. Then, as in our Saviour's most correct and holy example, it will be *disinterested*, *free* and *diffusive*; compassionate without *weakness*, and generous beyond *controul*. With respect to the *disposition* itself it will be large and unconfined, and, in the *exertions* of it, have all the scope that is desirable for the real good of mankind; nor defeat the ultimate *end* of our natural sentiments of commiseration and mercy, by converting *private favours* into *public injuries*.

But to proceed: another excellent property of that benevolence and goodness, which so illustriously distinguished the life of Christ, is, that it was *calm*, *gentle*, and *forgiving*. It could not be irritated, by any provocations, to a desire of *revenge*, nor be prevailed upon, by the most gross and undeserved indignities, to attempt a retaliation; but preserved an entire command over all *resentful* and *boisterous* passions, and ardently desired the *happiness* of the enemy and the persecutor, whilst it suffered by their *malice*. It was a constant maxim with the Son of God, to triumph over the insolence and injustice of his oppressors by an uninterrupted course of good offices; and conquer his enemies, not by *force*, but by meekness, compassion, and generosity. *He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth: when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.* And this branch of his *example* is, for its extraordinary amiableness and dignity, particularly recommended by the Apostle *Peter*, just after the words of

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my text, to the strict imitation of all *Christians*. And, surely, with the highest reason; because it discovers
 “ such a *freedom* and *greatness* of mind, such an *estab-*
 “ *lished* virtue, such a *steady* and *insuppressible* bene-
 “ volence of temper, as are never found but in the
 “ most raised and *godlike* characters.”

But the excellency and uncommon lustre of our blessed Saviour's example, in this respect, will appear in a yet stronger light to excite our esteem and admiration, if we turn our thoughts to *particular instances*. — We shall then find, that the mild and charitable author of our religion was a declared enemy to *persecution*, and to all methods of *severity* and *violence*, though upon the most plausible and specious pretences. For when two of his disciples, transported by a *frantic* and *cruel* zeal, proposed to him to command *fire from heaven* to *destroy* the rude and ungenerous *Samaritans*, who refused him a passage through one of their *villages*, for no other cause but because he was going to *Jerusalem*; and who, besides the affront which they offered to *him*, and their contempt of his *prophetic character*, were notorious *apostates* from the true religion, that was revealed and instituted by God himself: when two of his disciples, I say, proposed his revenging himself in so signal a manner on these *inhospitable*, *schismatical*, and *apostate Samaritans*; he rejected the motion with a noble *resentment*, and a severe *rebuke* of their intemperate zeal, in these remarkable words.---*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* “ To *injure* any on account
 “ of their *disrespect* to him, and for the sake of their
 “ *errors* and *corruptions* in *faith* or *worship*, was ab-
 “ solutely repugnant to the genius of his religion,
 “ and to the uniform course of his meek and bene-
 “ ficent life.”---A clear and uncontestable proof this, that the church of *Rome*, which is all over stained with *blood*, and has, for so many ages, practised the most *horrible barbarities* to maintain her unjust claims
 and

and infinite superstitions, “ is a *false* and *anticristian* church; and justly held by all who have a reverence for *Christ*, nay, by all who have not extirpated the common principles of *humanity*, in the utmost *scorn* and *detestation*.”

But not to disturb our thoughts, at this time, with a more particular representation of such *unnatural* and *shocking* characters, let us go on to survey a more delightful subject, the *lovely* and *admirable* example of the friend and saviour of mankind.—Let us view him when most heinously *insulted*, and under the most grievous scenes of his *distress* and *suffering*, and we shall find that “ the same *sweetness* of disposition, the same *unruffled* spirit of *soft* and *mild* benevolence still possessed him, and triumphed compleatly and gloriously over *proud* and *malignant* passions.” We all of us feel, that when our honour is stained by the rude attacks of *calumny*, when we are unjustly *despised*, and suffer groundless *abuse* and *wrong*, through the baseness and ingratitude of the world; it is extremely difficult, and an excellence that few, very few, attain to, to preserve the *evenness* and *composure* of our tempers. *Passion* is apt to grow *unruly*, and inspire designs of *revenge*; and, in the midst of this *tumult* within, the voice of *reason* is not heard, and the motions of *benevolence* are scarcely felt. But if we would accustom ourselves to contemplate, frequently, the *example* of the Son of God with a becoming seriousness and veneration, this would be a most effectual means to extirpate all the seeds of *malice* and *ungoverned resentment*; and while we *abhorred* the *injury*, it would teach us to maintain humanity and tenderness towards the *injurious*. For this divine person had led an *innocent*, *peaceable*, and *inoffensive* life; he was conscious to himself of no *views*, but what directly tended to the good of mankind; he never gave to any one of his countrymen the least ground for just *complaint*; but for his exemplary services to the world deserved universal *love* and *honour*. But when, notwithstanding all this, he

was

was branded with public *infamy*, apprehended as a notorious *malefactor*, and his life sacrificed to save that of a vile detestable *murderer*; when the priests and leading men of the *Jewish* nation made it an act of *religion*, and a point of eminent *merit*, to conspire and procure his *death*; when he was exposed, with *mock-pageantry*, to the derision and rage of the multitude; and, after many *preparatory* indignities, was at length, to glut the insatiate cruelty of his enemies, devoted to death, even the death of *slaves* and of the worst of *criminals*—"Do we find, under all these unparalleled provocations, that his meekness and universal benevolence deserted him, and gave him up a prey to *anger* and *impatience*? Was there so much as *one* expression dropt from him, which savoured in the least of *fierceness* and *inhumanity*? Did he discover the least *tincture* of an *implacable* and *unforgiving* spirit?" His friends will not blaspheme his character so much, as to cast such a dishonourable imputation upon him; and in this particular, his very *enemies* must be *ashamed* to defame him. For his *passions* were entirely calm, his *commiseration* was strong and lively, and his *generosity* unconquerable throughout the whole course of his sufferings. He resented, with a lively feeling of humanity, every thing that had the appearance of *cruelty*, even against those that fought his life; and therefore miraculously healed the *high-priest's* servant sent to apprehend him, whom one of his disciples had wounded: and he died gloriously, praying for his *persecutors*; "and as a proof of the noblest benevolence, and a perfectly *serene* and *undisturbed* mind, urging the *only* circumstance, that could be thought of, in *extenuation* of their guilt." This remarkable prayer is recorded by St. *Luke*, in these words, (which will doubtless be remembered to the *everlasting* honour of our Saviour's example) *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

We read indeed, sometimes, of his giving *severe* and *reproachful* names to persons eminent, and distin-

guished by their *wickedness*: but this is consistent with the utmost meekness and composure of spirit, whenever it is necessary, as it *then* was, to expose popular vices; hypocrisy and malice under the *masque* of devotion; and craft, rapaciousness, and oppression, *skreened* and *recommended* by their appearing in *high* characters. Our Lord's censures were only just *re-proofs*, seasonable *protests* against flagrant immoralities; and from which (as he appeared in the sublime character of the *messenger* and *prophet* of God) "no considerations of *prudence*, *complaisance*, or *decency* could be sufficient, in *reason*, to restrain him." For his office was to rebuke sin *impartially*; and the extraordinary *credentials*, which he brought from heaven, would support and justify him in *detecting* and *shaming* vice *wherever* he found it, even in the most *sacred* and *exalted* stations. "The *weight* and *authority* of his own mission, and the *rectitude* and *happiness* of the world, both demanded it."

And when, in some passages of the New Testament, *anger* is ascribed to Christ; it never denotes "that *wild* and *extravagant* passion, those *transports* of rage, that *confusion* and *perturbation* of thought, that thirst after *revenge* and *blood*, which are too usual marks and discoveries of anger in *precipitate* and *ungoverned* tempers. and drive *humanity* and *mercy* from the heart of man,"---but a *generous indignation* against *sin*. His resentment was not levelled at the *person* of the offender; but at his dissimulation, perfidiousness, cruelty, and other crimes, which are justly and highly *offensive* to the *wise* and *virtuous*. We are therefore expressly told, that while he looked round about on the *Pharisees* with *anger*, he was *grieved* for the *hardness* of their *hearts*: his soul was at the same time open to *kind* impressions, and he generously *pitied* their unhappy depravity. "So that our blessed Saviour's *benevolence* was as incapable of being obscured by *violent* and *disordered* passions; as it

“ was of being lessened by *injuries*, or discouraged by
 “ the *fear of death*.”

And as this excellent virtue was in the illustrious character of Christ *calm, mild, and forgiving*; it was also *humble and condescending*. Though he was *the beginning of the creation of God*, and before his incarnation possessed of inconceivable glory and dignity, yet he freely consented to that most *stupendous abasement* of assuming the human nature, to lead a life of *poverty, affliction, and disgrace*; and closed the scene of his *humiliation* by a *violent and ignominious death*. The *everlasting good* of mankind was the ultimate end he had in view: “ And this he thought an
 “ end so truly grand and noble, as that it was becoming him, though superior in *state and honour* to all
 “ the *angelical powers*, to be *himself a man* and converse *familiarly with men*, in order to promote it.”
 —This indeed is an instance of *condescension*, that admits of no *parallel* amongst all the creatures of God. Before it, the most *heroic* acts of *human generosity* are in a manner lost, and stripped of all their lustre. It is justly described, in the New Testament, as *astounding* even to *superior spirits*; the subject of their humble *contemplation*, and joyful *praises*. And to Christians of every degree and character, it speaks this language. *Look not every one on your own things, but every man also on the things of others; let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*. Let the example of his divine condescension (if you have merely a regard to *decency* of character) *shame* you out of your pride and haughtiness; and teach you to know your *nature*, and your *duty*, better, than to think it any disparagement to your brightest accomplishments, or the highest worldly honours, to practise the necessary *humilities* of true goodness; to consult and labour, and sacrifice *popularity, grandeur, nay life itself*, for the prosperity and welfare of your fellow-creatures. For the *inflexible* temper of pride, and a *disdainful* treatment of your inferior brethren, are not more un-

suitable to human nature, and the reason of things, than they are a direct contradiction to the spirit of Christianity, and to the conduct of its author; who himself says, *Take my yoke upon you, learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart.*

During the whole time of his public ministry, he was peculiarly remarkable, for a frank and obliging *humanity* of behaviour, to all who had the honour to converse with him. He lived both with his friends, and carried himself towards strangers, with an open generous *familiarity*; was easy of *access*; and ready to communicate instruction and relief to every *fit* and *worthy* object. He was of a *modest unassuming* temper, and industriously shunned *grandeur* and *ostentation*; avoiding company, and chusing solitude, when the people, infatuated by their carnal notions of the temporal reign of the Messiah, would have taken him by force to make him a *king*. And from this humble disposition sprang that *contentment* and entire *tranquility* of mind, which he always expressed in low and despised circumstances: as his being placed in such circumstances suggests another very important *reason* (besides the force of his *example*) for the practice of these virtues, by giving us an undeniable demonstration, that contempt and poverty are no marks of the *anger* and *displeasure* of heaven, since they were the lot of him who was perfectly innocent, and the beloved Son of God.

To all these excellent and useful virtues was added, in the life and example of Christ, an unstained and inviolable *integrity*; not *rash*, and *incautious*, and courting dangers unnecessarily; but guided by a *just discretion*, and yet steady and inflexible. In his doctrine, he *so far* consulted the *prejudices* of his hearers, as to open and enlarge their minds by *degrees*. He avoided the persecutions of his enemies, and the effects of their implacable malice, when he could do it with *honour* and a *good conscience*. But he never used any *arts* to deceive them into *wrong meanings*; never, by *studied*

died ambiguities of speech, flattered and confirmed them in their errors. He opposed *corruption* and *vice*, however universal and fashionable, however distinguished and dignified; and at last bravely died in maintenance of his own integrity, and for the cause of truth and virtue, which are the cause of God and man.

I have attempted nothing more than some of the great lines, but intended not, in all particulars, a complete illustration of the shining excellencies, of our Saviour's example; because the nature of such compositions as these would not, without being thought tedious, admit of such prolix discourse.—I shall, therefore, only add, that our profession and character, as Christians, oblige us to make this example as far as it has now been exhibited (and in all the other branches of it, in which it is capable of being imitated) the model of our own lives: or, in the language of St. John, that every one *that abideth in Christ*, whether more or less enlightened, *ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*

DISCOURSE XXIV.

The Scripture doctrine of Justification explained.

[FOSTER.]

ROM. x. 3.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

AS mankind, in all ages, have invented such *strange and unaccountable* methods of serving God and securing his favour, as, one would think, could never be depended on where there is the lowest degree of *understanding*, or capacity for *reasoning*; and as Christians themselves bewildered and stupefied by *sounds*, so as not to attend to the *true sense* of revelation, have devised various schemes to the same purpose grossly *frivolous and absurd*, as well as utterly *insufficient* to answer the end proposed; whereby, notwithstanding all their *superior* advantages, they have really fallen short of what *the light of nature itself* plainly and strongly intimates: I thought it might be of great use to explain the necessary terms of *pardon*, and *acceptance* with God, as they are proposed and represented in the gospel; and to shew that what may, at first sight, seem *peculiar* in them, has nothing in it

capricious

capricious and arbitrary; but is exactly and wisely adapted to the constitution and present state of human nature, and, "so far coincides with the universal and immutable law of reason."

The favour of the Deity is allowed by all, who acknowledge him under the character of supreme moral governor, to be an inestimable blessing, and an essential part of the true felicity of every intelligent creature. It is likewise admitted, as a necessary consequence from this first unquestionable principle, that it is of the highest possible moment to us to be the objects of his esteem and complacency.--But when we come to resolve the next question, how this supreme privilege of our nature may be most certainly secured, "here the confusion begins; we are divided in our sentiments, and lost in dark disputations: we follow our peculiar schemes, all expecting the same happy event hereafter, though it be manifest that these schemes, in the consequences that directly result from them, are quite incompatible, and subversive of each other; and that the same end cannot be served by all alike (if they are pursued and acted upon according to their most natural tendency) unless it can be equally promoted by plain and irreconcilable contradictions."

Miserable indeed, inexpressibly miserable, would the fate of mankind be by nature, if this grand point was in itself ambiguous, and scarce determinable; miserable would it be, and a solid foundation for gloominess and anxiety of mind, if there were so many unavoidable chances against our supreme happiness, as this notion must include in it: if we were thus necessitated to grope our way in the dark, in the midst of dangers; strongly concern'd and solicitous, and at the same time perplexed and uncertain, about the final result of our enquiries. But if we actually miss the direct and sure path, when, by attention and care, we might easily have discovered and traced it right, our misfortune is so far from being lessened, that it must, upon the

whole, be increased and aggravated, by a conscious sense of *guilt*. Our *misery*, the less it is owing to an original cause in nature, and the more it may be ascribed to voluntary error, will always be, in proportion, the more severely and deeply *felt*.—And to what do these reflections lead? Most certainly to this general conclusion: that divesting ourselves of all *prejudice*, that with an *ingenuous uncorrupted* temper, with *calm, engaged and serious* minds, we apply ourselves to examine “ what is the *true and only* way, in which the “ infinite creator and sovereign ruler of the world is “ determined to dispense his *mercy*; or, upon *what* “ terms, we may reasonably expect to find *acceptance* “ with him.”

This fundamental article of religion is stiled by St. Paul, in the text, *the righteousness of God*:—and the sum of his doctrine on this head, and especially in his epistle to the *Romans*, is as follows.—That *perfect innocence* is not the *condition* insisted on, because it is what mankind can never expect to attain to, in their present state of weakness and frailty; and, upon *this* foot, they are absolutely excluded from the hope of *mercy*, since *all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God*. That the *gentiles* in particular had, in innumerable instances, deviated from *the law of nature*, and therefore were in a *lost and desperate* state, if the term required was *perfect obedience* to that unchangeable moral law: and that the *Jews* could not be *justified* according to the strict tenor of their *law of works*; which was *rigorous and inflexible*, running in this discouraging strain: *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them*.---What then is to be done? Is the misery of the *moral world* quite *remediless*? Is there *no way*, in which they may secure the *favour* of their supreme governour and judge? “ *None at all*, but by introducing a *milder law* condescending and merciful to “ our infirmities, and which accepts of *sincerity* instead of complete obedience.” Such a scheme, therefore,

therefore, as *this* St. Paul concludes from the whole, was *necessary* to be introduced; this he asserts to be the *Christian* scheme; this he strenuously argues for as the *only* scheme, by which any man can be *justified* in the sight of God: this he styles being *justified by faith without the deeds of the law; the righteousness of God without the law*, i. e. without the necessity of an *exact* and *unerring* conformity to it; *the law of faith: and the law of righteousness*.

But because this is a matter of the highest importance, as it immediately concerns the very *essential* frame and constitution of Christianity, and our just and well supported hopes of pardon and eternal salvation, I shall explain it a little more distinctly; in order to clear it both from the charge of being an *irrational* and *arbitrary* scheme, and from the *darkness* and *confusion* in which it has been involved. What then is intended by *the righteousness of faith*, which the text represents as *God's righteousness*?---The same apostle's account of it is, I think, evidently this: that both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were upon embracing the gospel, and professing faith in Christ, free from the guilt of all their *past sins*, and brought into a state of reconciliation with God. If it be asked *what faith* it was, that intitled them to this eminent and glorious privilege: I answer in St. Paul's own words, *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*. Should it be inquired farther, "What connection *this faith* has with *sincerity*, which " I have supposed to be the *universal condition* of acceptance with God under the dispensation of the " gospel;" and the *general head*, to which all the qualifications therein specified are, and must be, reduced? I answer, again, " that in the *first* age of " Christianity, especially, the receiving and owing a " religion against the *united force* of *prepossession*, *corrupt passion*, and *worldly interest*, the embracing a " religion that was *condemned* by public authority, and " every where *despised* and *persecuted*, a religion that

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“restrained all criminal excesses, and required sublime
 “refinement and purity of heart, and the strictest
 “outward virtue; that such a conduct, as this, was
 “a singular proof of integrity; and, farther, that *faith*,
 “in *this* view of it, was such an uncommon instance of
 “moral rectitude, as was very properly distinguished by
 “special marks of the divine approbation: and,
 “finally, that the *faith* which justified could, in the
 “nature of things, be that *only*, which the searcher
 “of all hearts knew to be *sincere*; that *alone*, which
 “was accompanied with an honest undissembled re-
 “solution to amend *all* former errors, and prac-
 “tise *every* branch of the extensive and exalted good-
 “ness which Christianity requires; and would *actually*
 “produce, as far as opportunities were allowed for it,
 “all the fruits of moral righteousness.” So that chris-
 “tian justifying *faith* necessarily includes, in the very
 “idea of it, “uprightness and probity of heart;” and
 “was therefore *accepted* by the wisdom and condescend-
 “ing goodness of the universal sovereign, for the re-
 “mission of sins that were past. But then it must be con-
 “sidered, that it was for the remission of *these only*; and
 “that in order to our being justified at last, before the
 “awful tribunal of God, *faith* must be allowed to have
 “its *natural* influence, and show itself to be a *lively* and
 “*efficacious* principle, by regulating every evil disposi-
 “tion, controuling all licentious appetites, and ex-
 “citing to a constant course of piety, and to every good
 “work. Hence it is, that St. *John* has represented the
 “faith of a Christian as *untainted* by the pollutions of
 “the world, and *superior* to all the snares and tempta-
 “tions of it: *This*, says he, *is the victory that overcometh*
 “*the world, even our faith*. And St. *Paul* has described
 “the substance of true Christianity thus, *faith working*
 “*by love*: which he expresses in the parallel texts by
 “other terms, by the *new creature*, or an entire conver-
 “sion from vice and impurity to holiness and rectitude
 “of life, as if the *moral constitution* of the man was quite

modelled and formed anew; and by keeping the commandment of God.

From this short state of the doctrine, deduced not from *obscure and figurative phrases*, but from most *express and plain testimonies* of holy scripture, every attentive mind will easily discern the entire correspondence that there is between the two apostles, St. Paul and St. James, in the great point of *Justification*. This affair has been strangely puzzled by religious *schematists*, without the least apparent ground for it. Difficulties have been started about a thing in itself most evident; and greatly increased by the laborious trifling, and the subtle blind distinctions, apply'd to the solution of them. Nay, too many among us, in the intemperance and heat of *controversy*, have been apt to represent one of these apostles as less *evangelical* than the other, for no other reason but because there are fewer passages, in his writings, that can be *accommodated* to their favourite schemes. *I am of James, and I of Paul*, seems to be too just a description of the inward *sentiment* of the mind, upon these occasions; though they have not been actually used as *terms of distinction*. But be cool, and deliberate a little, and seriously ask yourselves the following questions, which are as rational and forcible *now*, as they were in the first times of Christianity.—*Was James crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? Or is Christ divided? Or can the doctrines asserted by his immediate followers, from whom we derive our knowledge of the essential principles of the gospel, clash and interfere with each other? Were some thoroughly versed in the mysteries, the deep things of Christianity, and others but slightly and superficially instructed; ministers of the letter, and not of the spirit? May one be exalted and another degraded, when the authority of both is exactly the same, and their commission and directions are equally divine? There can be no ground for suppositions of this kind, unless we allow, at the same time, that the very foundations*

dations of our religion are *shaken*; and, in the instance before us, there plainly is none.

For what is it that St. Paul has advanced, why, that we are *justified by faith without the deeds of the law*.—And what is the *sense* and *intent* of this proposition? Let it be interpreted by his own *avowed doctrine* in innumerable other passages (which is but common sense, and common justice) and it can possibly amount to no more than this. “That the only condition of pardon and justification is *a sincere faith*, producing “a uniform course of *sincere obedience* to the laws of “God; and not *absolute uncorrupted innocence*, or the “*perfection of virtue*.” And has St. James ever asserted the *contrary*? Nay, is not this the very thing, which he so earnestly contends for; *this*, I say, “that “*obedience and works of righteousness* are the *life* of “*faith*?”—Or suppose the *former* to have meant, that “the *ceremonial law* was, under the gospel constitution, no part of *acceptable religion*,” has the *latter* so much as intimated any thing in *opposition* to it?—If again we take St. Paul thus; “That upon “*faith* in Christ considered (which it justly might be “in those days) as a remarkable instance of *integrity* “and *moral virtue*, God was pleased to be propitious “and receive his guilty creatures into *favour*, not “withstanding their *former irregularities*,” there is *still* no appearance of a *contradiction*: for the other apostle has not touched on *this topic*, but treated the subject in a quite *different* light.

If, indeed, St. Paul had asserted such libertine principles as these “that *faith alone*, without the “practice of immutable *moral duties*, was sufficient “to our *final justification* before the judgment seat of Christ;” if instead of *expressly* declaring, that *without holiness no man shall*, he had affirmed, “that “without holiness any man *may*, see the Lord:” he would then have contradicted St. James, and the sober sentiment of every rational being in the universe. His principles must then have sunk his character, and

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rendered his name infamous. No baser aspersions can be thrown upon him, no greater indignity offered to his memory. To call him a deluded *enthusiast* is doing him honour, in comparison with representing him thus as an *advocate* for *licentiousness*. But as he has, in all his epistles, inculcated *morality* as an indispensable part of the *Christian* character; as he has declared, in the plainest and most forcible terms, that *to be carnally minded is death*, that *gross* and *habitual* offenders, of *all* kinds, shall hereafter be infallibly *excluded* the *everlasting kingdom of God*; and that, in *Christ Jesus*, nothing can be depended upon as of any real *significancy*, but a *working faith*: what is this but laying it down as the scheme and fixed law of the gospel, that in order to our continuance in a justified state, and to our solemn absolution by the supreme Judge, our faith must have this *effect* upon us, to produce *love* and *piety* towards God, and acts of *beneficence* and *goodness* to our fellow-creatures?—What is it but declaring with St. *James*, that we must *shew our faith by our works*, and that *as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*; and subscribing, as the result of all, “to the same general conclusion, *viz.* that *a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*?”—According to the *one*, faith, as a conspicuous example and proof of virtue, *first* recommended to the favour of God; and this position the other has no where disputed: but according to *both*, if the professed Christian afterwards held *the truth in unrighteousness*, and continued to have *faith alone*, and had not *works*, “he was absolutely “cut off from the hope of salvation.” Thus have I shown, upon the whole, the true sense of that phrase, *the righteousness of God*; which the unbelieving *Jews* were ignorant of, and in the place of which, they sought to establish *their own righteousness*.

What the apostle intended by *that*, I now proceed, in the second place, to consider.—That none of the blind and giddy race of mankind can expect to be justified

tified by a *law* that requires *perfect rectitude*, is the clear voice of *reason*, as well as the unquestionable doctrine of the *gospel*. And that our moral righteousness, when carried to the sublimest height, and cultivated in the utmost extent which it is at present capable of, cannot be said, in *strict justice*, to *merit* the glorious reward of eternal life; this likewise must be the *natural sentiment* of every wise and considerate man, as it is the *profess'd judgment* of St. Paul. Both these are certain and established maxims in the nature of things, and not the *new* and *peculiar* principles of revealed religion.

But what of all this?---Because mankind are *incapable* of pleasing their maker, by yielding an *absolute* and *invariable* obedience to the eternal laws of righteousness; does it follow from hence, "that they cannot render themselves *acceptable* to him, by a universal course of *sincere* obedience?" Are *good* dispositions, and *sincere* endeavours to serve and honour him, of *no* *significancy* with the wisest and most compassionate of all beings, "for want of something, which the very *original constitution* of our nature has put it quite *out of our power*?" Is the *prevailing* turns and bias of our minds insufficient to *plead* for us; "and are our *involuntary* and *unallowed* imperfections of weight enough, even with *impartial* *mercy* to *condemn* us?" Because virtue does not *properly*, and in an *exact* notion of *equity*, *merit* the transcendent honour and felicity, to which it is the gracious appointment of God that it shall be hereafter advanced, "has it, therefore, no *loveliness* and *worth* in it, to render it a *fit* and *suitable* object of *peculiar* *favour* and *complacency*?" These, surely, are inferences drawn at random, and by confounding things that have no relation to each other: And it seems, on the contrary, to be one of the *first* principles that the light of nature teaches; that the righteous God must *necessarily*, and determined by his own essential *moral rectitude*, love *righteousness*, and take pleasure in the

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upright. St. Paul therefore, when he upbraided the mistaken and conceited Jews, with going about to establish *their own righteousness*, could not design to depreciate *personal virtue* and *inherent goodness*, because these are the *chief* excellence and honour of *every* intelligent being: and, when they are the prevailing temper and habit of the mind, render a man more *worthy* of the *esteem* of his fellow-creatures, and better *qualified* for the *grace* of God, than any other thing, without them, can *possibly* do.

If we compare together *mere faith* and *moral righteousness*, the latter has vastly the *preference* with respect to intrinsic and real value. There may be a faith perfectly *orthodox*, or a *clear* and *firm* assent to all speculative principles of religion, in the *vilest* and most *detestable* characters. For even *the devils believe*, and *tremble*. Nay, if God from his mere *pleasure*, and to shew forth his *sovereignty* had so determined, these same *devils* might have been, as far as I can see, *imputatively* clothed with the righteousness of another, and might also, under that splendid covering have been presented before the supreme justice as *perfect*, with the same strict truth and propriety, as this privilege can be allowed to the ungodly and sinful part of *Adam's* race; continuing *sinful* and *ungodly*. And yet, surely, if while they were dressed in these robes *not their own*, they retained their malignant and diabolical *dispositions*, "they must in every sense of the word, that carries with it *guilt*, *horror*, and *ignominy*, have remained *devils* still."---But could you suppose "a *moral change* to be effected, in the *temper* and *inward complexion* of the apostate spirits;" were it possible for them "to become thoroughly and habitually *benevolent*, *merciful*, *humble*, *reverent* of God, and adorned with *complete rectitude* of nature;" they would no longer appear, as they did, before *disgraceful*, they would no longer excite *dread* and *abhorrence*, but be really turned into *angels of light*. The constitution of their nature would be harmonious and regular;

regular; and considered merely, with respect to the qualities they were *then* possessed of, they must of necessity be *grateful* and *acceptable* to God. But the making them in themselves *amiable*, and *just* objects of *esteem*, is an effect that no clearness, extent, or strength of *faith*, no *imputation* of what does not inherently belong to them, no *borrowed* righteousness can ever produce.

And indeed the language of the gospel is evidently in this strain, that we are justified, not by the *perfect* righteousness, but by the *death* of Christ: The New Testament assures us, that not his obedience, but our own faith, is *imputed to us for righteousness*; that *God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in, or by us*, and not *by him* for us; and that the great Governour of the world, in the revelation of his just and impartial judgment, will *render unto every man*, not as works, performed by *another*, have been *transferred* and *placed* to his account, but *according to his own deeds*. Nay, farther, should we admit this doctrine to be *true*, mankind could no longer be considered as *in* themselves, and *solely in* themselves, *moral* and *accountable* creatures; nor would the future judgment “be an equitable distribution of *rewards* and *punishments*, but only God’s “awful and uncontrollable execution of his own *arbitrary* and *irreversible* decrees:”—by which supposition the *basis* of Christianity is undermined, and the whole frame of it falls to the ground; nor “does it “fall *alone*, but buries in its *ruins*, the religion of “*nature* and *reason* too.” And besides this, the doctrine, which I am now opposing, renders *repentance*, *personal* reformation, and *inherent* rectitude entirely needless. For if a *solemn covenant* was ratified between God and the Mediator, that he should *fulfil the law* for the *elect* race of mankind; and that they should be reckoned *perfectly righteous* in *his* righteousness, and as having *perfectly obeyed* in *his* obedience---What is there *left* for *man* to do? God has been *satisfied* in *all* his

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his demands; his *law*, his *honour*, his rigorous relentless *justice* are all satisfied; and therefore, in strict equity, he can demand *nothing farther*. The believer indeed out of *mere generosity* may, if he pleases, add works of *righteousness* of *his own*, but his main interest is *secure* without it: and the *favour* of God, in virtue of the antecedent *covenant* made with Christ, (and *fulfilled* on his part) is *certain* and *irrevocable*. Add to all that has been said, that this notion, of a *substituted* and *vicarious* righteousness, seems absurd even to common sense, and to the most *natural* and *easy* reflections of men. For *obedience* and *righteousness* are, in the nature of the things themselves, personal qualities, and entirely so. Every man is *that only* (and can be nothing else) which he is *in himself*. "If he is *prophane*, *proud*, and *intemperate*, he can never be the *less* so, for *another man's* being perfectly "devout, humble, and regular." If he is *unjust*, he must be unjust *still*; if *unholy*, unholy *still*. And if his vices are *naturally* and *intrinsically* detestable, "he, "also, must continue to be the *fit* and *proper* subject "of dislike and aversion." And it should be considered further, that the *obedience* of *Christ* (which, upon *every scheme*, he was *only* capable of yielding as a *subjected* and *dependent* creature) that the *obedience* of *Christ*, I say, was *wholly due for himself*; and therefore could, by no means, be an *equivalent* for the *obedience* that was due from *any other single being* in the universe. Far be it from us, then, to impute this confused heap of errors to the christian doctrine, which is in *all* the parts of it worthy of God, and *chiefly* recommends itself to the esteem and reverence of the *truly wise*.—For the *sum* of it, as it results from the foregoing discourse, which has been built on plain evidences and demonstrations of scripture, is in short this, "That the law of *faith*, by which *Christians* are "said to be *justified*, amounts to *no more*, as to the "main substance and *intent* of it, than the law of *sincerity*:"—That faith was never designed to denote

the bare assent of the mind to principles of truth, nor ever stands for a barren and inefficacious speculation; but always signifies an internal and genuine principle of piety and habitual virtue, is always considered as an act of integrity, an eminent example and demonstration of it.---That if our faith really led to immorality, it would be presumption and blasphemy to stile it a divine faith: but as it teaches us to aspire after the sublimest height and utmost extent of virtue, if our conduct be licentious and dissolute, it must, upon this very account, be the more scandalous and inexcusable.---That immoral actions speak intelligibly, and proclaim to all the world either that it is our opinion that our faith is good for nothing, and ought not to be allowed its natural influence; or else, that we are to be held by no tie, and can set at defiance the most sacred principles, which is an infallible sign, that scarce a spark of honour or probity of mind is subsisting within us. And for the very same reason, on which faith is accepted and rewarded when it is a mark of integrity, it must of necessity, be rejected as an insufficient plea, by our upright and all-discerning Judge, when it is attended with flagrant dishonesty. So that upon the whole, the law of righteousness by faith comes to much the same, if we take in the foundation and true scope of it, and all the cases to which, by a parity of reason, it may and must be extended; it then, I say, comes "to much the same with that more general rule laid down by St. John, that he that doeth righteousness is righteous." For justifying faith, as it is above explained, may with great propriety be stiled an act of moral righteousness. It springs from virtue, and terminates in it: "In virtue, the sincere practice of which, according to the light and advantages which they severally enjoy, may be considered as an uniform and invariable law of righteousness with respect to all nations; and a means of procuring indulgence and mercy for many, who never heard of Christ, from the father and friend of the whole race of mankind."

DIS-

DISCOURSE XXV.

Religious Obedience founded on Personal
Persuasion.

[ABERNETHY.]

ROM. xiv. 5.

— *Let every Man be fully persuaded in his
own Mind.*

THERE have been, in every age of the church, different sentiments among Christians concerning points both of belief and practice; and it cannot be reasonably hoped that it should be otherwise, while *we know but in part*. Diversity of judgments is a natural consequence from human imperfection, which cleaves to believers as well as others: And since our capacities, means of information, and diligence, besides many other things, which have an influence on the understanding, are so unequal, is it ever to be expected we shall perfectly agree in our opinions? But must the peace of the church on that account be broken? Then it could never possibly be preserved, and all the rules of the gospel concerning it would be impracticable, indeed mere insignificancies; for they must depend on a most precarious, nay impossible condition. But certainly our blessed Redeemer was not wanting in his care for necessary order and harmony among his servants:

We may therefore safely conclude, that such an agreement in sentiments, is no part of that necessary order, since he has made no provision for it. On the contrary, all the directions which he and his apostles gave about charity and forbearance, suppose differences to remain among Christians: Indeed they are such, as if we did conform ourselves to them, there would be an end of unchristian debates and contentions, not in an exact unanimity of judgment and uniformity of practice, but in *charity, which is the bond of perfectness*.

My text has an immediate reference to the division between the *Jewish* and the *Gentile* Christians, about the observance of the *Mosaical* rites. The *Jews*, even after they were converted to Christianity, not only retained a great affection for their antient usages, but were persuaded the law enjoining them was of perpetual obligation: It is probable too, they had an excessive veneration for the customs received by tradition from their fathers, which were founded on no divine institution at all. But whether the mistake took its rise from the one or the other of these causes, that is, whether they believed the ceremonial law was still in force, or weakly imagined themselves bound to observe the traditions of the elders, the conviction of their own minds was their rule, and their consciences directed them to the distinction they made between *meats* and *days*. On the other hand, the *Gentiles*, who never had been under the yoke of *Moses's* law, or the constitution of the *Jewish* church, were by their first instructions in Christianity so far from any injunction to obey, as to be taught their freedom from that heavy burden, and the reason they had to *stand fast in their liberty, and not to be entangled with the yoke of bondage*; tho' charity in some cases might direct them to wave their privilege, and comply with their weak brethren for avoiding offence. Thus far, however, the difference was innocent; tho' in such cases, truth must always be on one side, and error

on

on the other. And here the mistake was, on the part of the *Jews*, retain'd too with obstinate prejudice against the convincing evidence of plain gospel-declarations, confirm'd by a multitude of miracles, especially the gift of the spirit, *by the bearing of faith without the works of the law*. At last, the dissensions of these parties grew to such a height, as to affect their charity and christian communion, not by the natural tendency of difference in opinion, but from the *lusts of men that war in their members*. He who was well instructed in gospel-liberty, and neglected the abrogated distinction of *meats and days*, despised his brother who was *otherwise minded*, as weak and ignorant; and he, on the other hand, was censured by him as profane, for treating with contempt, things which seemed to be still sacred by divine appointment, or by a venerable ecclesiastical custom. Then the holy spirit saw it needful to interpose; and by his direction the apostle lays down such rules, as, if duly observed, would perpetuate concord among Christians, in that and all parallel cases. The sum of them is this: The servants of our Lord must not presume to judge or condemn one another, since all must stand before his tribunal, and there *receive according to what they have done in the body*: They must not venture *to judge before the time*, or declare any out of his favour for professing opinions, and using practices, wherein it is impossible for men to know they act insincerely: Nor must they make arbitrary inclosures within the church of Christ, the doors of which are, according to his will, left open to all his true disciples; nor form themselves into sects, distinguished by peculiar tenets and usages: Such as we cannot know to be unworthy of God's acceptance, we should not judge unworthy of our fellowship, but receive them as brethren into christian communion, and not exclude them by the rigid test of an exact agreement in doubtful and disputable points.

The words of my text are a strong inforcement of this peaceful and charitable demeanour of Christians one towards another: For if every man, in order to his acceptance with God, ought *to be fully persuaded in his own mind*, then surely it is reasonable they should be left to their own freedom, and not compell'd by methods of violence to act with a gain-saying or doubting conscience; which is the plain tendency of severe reproachful censures, and an exclusion from the privileges of fellow-christians. In such cases, to judge and to reject those who are *weak in the faith*, is to act directly against the will of God, and against the interest of true religion: For God requires that his *people should be willing*, and that his service should be their choice upon full conviction; and therefore while they struggle with their remaining infirmities and prejudices, and are growing up by degrees, from error into the knowledge of truth, he bears with them, communicating light as they are capable of it. This was the way our blessed Saviour treated his disciples; who, on many occasions, appeared *slow of heart to believe* the truth, and indeed were possess'd with strong prejudices against it: Yet he never thrust them away from his society for their ignorance and errors, but exercised patience towards them, 'till at last, under his gracious care, and by his meek and compassionate instructions, they arrived at mature knowledge. But, ah! how unlike the spirit of their great master? When he *went to receive a kingdom to himself*, his servants began to rule over their fellow-servants with rigour; they must be beaten into their duty, and even the understanding of it by the terrors of excommunication, and the wrath of God denounc'd against them, not for acting contrary to the *persuasion of their minds*, but according to it: Truth, or what is judg'd so by men, must be forc'd upon them, whether they can receive it or not; and for the sake of what church-guides are pleas'd to call decency, (taking their notions of it too much from

from this world) a strict compliance in things confessedly unscriptural, at least unessential, must be rigorously enjoin'd.

But I design to consider the words which I have taken for the subject of this discourse, not only as they are of use to Christians in their societies, recommending charity and mutual forbearance, but as a direction to every man singly : And they contain this important doctrine, that *religious obedience is founded on personal persuasion*. We have all of us to do with God, and every man at last must give an account of himself in particular. It concerns us therefore to govern ourselves by some steady principle, which may give us confidence towards our great Lord at his appearance : It is from him we are to expect our reward, and what may please him ought to be the only point in question with his servants : The decisions of men are not infallible declarations of his mind, and we cannot be safe in submitting to them absolutely ; tho' our doing so may secure us against the reproaches of the world, yet it will not be a sufficient defence against the reproaches of our consciences, or the displeasure of God.

The apostle rather recommends another rule, namely, *the full persuasion of our own minds* ; I suppose it will be allow'd he means a persuasion concerning the truth of what we profess, or the lawfulness of what we do. To imagine that we are necessarily determin'd to a particular opinion, as if he had said, let every man have a right persuasion, and let his sentiments be exactly agreeable to the truth, otherwise he shall not be accepted : I say, to imagine this, were to make the rule entirely useless, because it could never be applied, and to contradict the plain design of the whole chapter : For he all along supposes a difference both of judgment and practice to remain ; and yet teaches that it will not affect the state of any man with respect to the favour of God. *For the kingdom of God is not* (the essence of Christianity does not

consist in, and our acceptance does not depend on) *meat and drink*, (any external observances, or abstaining from them; or mens different opinions concerning them) *but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and* (ought to be) *approved of men**. I think therefore, it is certain the text must be thus understood: "All sincere Christians have not
 " attained to an equal measure of understanding,
 " nor can be, after their most impartial inquiries,
 " of the same sentiments in every particular: But
 " let none be shock'd in their charity towards others,
 " or in the hopes of their own acceptance on that
 " account. Let every man enjoy the freedom of fol-
 " lowing the light of his conscience, and no Chris-
 " tians carry their zeal for agreement so far, as to
 " break in upon the essential condition of our title
 " to God's favour, which is acting sincerely accord-
 " ing to the inward conviction of our minds."

The apostle's rule, according to this plain sense of it, is so evident, so perfectly agreeable to the invariable reason and nature of things, and to the declarations of the gospel, not a few texts only, but the general design and tenor of the Christian revelation; that one would think there should be no debate concerning it. But the interests and passions of men dividing them into parties, and engaging them to pursue other ends than purely those of religion, have given birth to strange inventions, and been able to raise such clouds as involve the most obvious important truths in thick darkness. I shall therefore think it not unnecessary to illustrate by some arguments what the spirit of God has here so clearly taught us.

But before I come to that, I shall,

I. Explain the nature of the persuasion which is here required, and whereby a man must hope to be approved of God, and justified to himself.

* Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

II. I shall

II. I shall consider the proper object of our persuasion; or what things they are, concerning which we must be persuaded. And then,

III. I shall endeavour to illustrate by some arguments the apostle's doctrine in my text.

I. I am to explain the nature of the persuasion which is here required, and whereby a man must hope to be approved of God, and justified to himself. We shall fatally mistake, if we think ourselves safe in following every rash and indeliberate judgment, the hasty suggestions of a vain unguided imagination, or of irregular desires and passions; such a conduct is so far from being either rational or religious, that it is the perfect reverse of them both: Instead of pleasing God, it is the greatest affront to his authority, and to act, or rather to be acted, by the impetuous fury of a blind and brutal impulse, instead of *being persuaded in one's own mind*. Every one that understands the actings of his own soul, and seriously reflects on its powers, knows what difference there is between being *persuaded*, which is an assent form'd upon evidence and attentive reasoning, and an indeliberate determination without evidence and without enquiry. It is true, in the assent of our minds to, or dissent from any proposition, we are wholly passive, being necessarily and inevitably determin'd by the evidence which appears to us. It is not in our power to refuse, or so much as suspend such an assent or dissent; not from any faulty impotence, but, as far as I can see, from the essential frame of the soul itself, and in that wherein by the very constitution of our nature we have no liberty, there can be neither moral good nor evil. But since we know by experience, and the scripture teaches us, we are apt to run into mistakes thro' inattention, and the secret influence of our affections and passions; it must be our unquestionable

unquestionable duty, as it is indeed the best use we can make of our reason, to guard against the springs of error, especially in the judgments and resolutions we form concerning points of faith and obedience to God; which being of the greatest importance to our salvation, the freest exercise of our understandings is required in them, that we may serve God, and promote our own happiness, as becomes rational creatures.

From hence I infer two necessary conditions of that persuasion, which only will render us acceptable in the matters of belief and practice. *1st*, That it be deliberate; for sudden and rash conclusions, without duly weighing the reasons upon which they are founded, and what evidence there may be on the opposite side, are the reproach of intelligent natures, such as ours! which, not being capable to comprehend at one view the reason of things, must therefore proceed leisurely, and supply, as far as we can, the defect of capacity by serious consideration. *2dly*, Our persuasion ought to be unprejudiced, free from passion, or the influence of any consideration, except that which should rationally determine us; that is, in the present case, any thing but the pure evidence of the mind and will of God. When foreign motives are brought into the counsels of the soul, and it inclines to one side of the question in debate, by the opinions of other men, by worldly interest, by the bias of its own corrupt affections, by a fond respect to preconceived notions, which render it unwilling thro' pusillanimity, pride or sloth, to undergo the fatigue of an impartial examination, or bear the reproach of a discovered mistake; when any of these things, or others of a like nature, influence the mind, it fails in its duty, and comes short of that persuasion upon which alone it can act with safety.

But if those two conditions are duly observ'd, I do not see what more can possibly be required according to the essential constitution of our souls, or according to the gospel, to our acting with confidence as approved

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proved to God and to ourselves; for acting according to a persuasion thus qualified, is the very essence of *sincerity*; by which only it is, that any of the sons of men can *assure their hearts before God*: It must be confessed, that none of mankind can attain to it perfectly in this world; we are still obnoxious to errors of judgment, and failures in practice, through inattention and prejudices, irregular appetites and passions, the weakness and vices of the mind, of which we shall not be altogether divested in this imperfect state. But yet such an upright disposition, I mean, such prevailing degrees of it (and I have shewn wherein it consists) may be attained, as will not only render us acceptable to God, but afford us sufficient ground of confidence that we are accepted; for otherwise, one end of the gospel revelation would be defeated. Our Saviour *spoke*, and his apostles *wrote* to Christians that *their joy might be full* *? that they might know they have a title to *eternal life* †: But *that joy and knowledge* they could have no other way than by an inward testimony of their sincerity; and sincerity may be known in the manner I have mentioned, or which is the same thing, acting habitually according to the *persuasion of our own minds*, in the sense of the apostle, and so far as the present infirmity of human nature will allow. He is a sincere person, and may enjoy the comfortable assurance of his sincerity, who in opposition to his worldly interest, and the sinful inclinations of his heart, faithfully endeavours to do the will of God, and to abstain from every known sin, who willingly, and with a ready mind, embraces every discovered truth, and renounces every discovered error, and who continually labours to find out his remaining sins and mistakes, that he may reject them; such a person, I say, is sincere, and may know himself to be so, though there are still defects in his sincerity, through the unseen and unallowed

* John xi. 11.

† John v. 13.

influence of the corrupt motives of his heart. This seems to be the only just foundation upon which a man can act in the matters of *conscience*, so as to please God and have a *witness in himself*; and happy is he who is *thus persuaded in his own mind*. But surely none is able to judge of it, except every man's own conscience: 'Tis there the pleasures of self-approbation are felt, and the pains of a reproaching heart. *No man knoweth those things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is within him*: We may indeed sometimes, even in judging of ourselves, and the *persuasion of our minds*, be embarrass'd with difficulties and scruples, which generally take their rise from the influence of wrong motives; but a considerate person will find, in conducting himself by this rule, that freedom of thought, not hurried by the violence of the imagination and passions, that undisturb'd tranquillity, which he knows to be the happiest state of his mind, its very health and strength.

You may observe the peculiar force of the apostle's expression, *let every man have a plerophory*, or as it is very well render'd in our translation, let him *be fully persuaded*: The matter being of the greatest importance, let him, in all cases of conscience, use his utmost endeavours to obtain the greatest certainty he can possibly arrive at: Let him not content himself with a slight and superficial examination; for all the industry he can use is required, and nothing less will bear him out. Not that we can expect an equal degree of evidence in all cases of duty and of conscience; we must be satisfied with such a measure of it as the nature and circumstances of the thing will admit, and in disputable cases we ought to chuse that side on which the greatest clearness lies. Thus we can never be under a necessity of acting *against or without conviction*; for a sincere soul will always find a refuge either in doing or forbearing, and it may be hoped

hoped an impartial and patient enquiry will issue in a persuaded judgment and firm resolution. But in every case let a man preserve his own liberty inviolable, and not be induced, by respect to men, or any worldly consideration, while he is persuaded on the contrary, or while he *doubts to eat meats or abstain from them, to observe or neglect days!* in fine, to do or forbear any thing that falls within the wide sphere of conscience, wherein the last decision of *his own* understanding must be his immediate rule.

II. *I am to consider what is the proper object of our persuasion; or what things they are concerning which we must be persuaded.* And 'tis plain from the occasion and scope of the apostle's discourse, he speaks of things which are not essential to Christianity, but yet matters of conscience. The *Jewish* and *Gentile* Christians were agreed in the fundamental doctrines and the great duties of religion. There were no debates among them concerning *faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God*; only they differed about ceremonial injunctions, which some thought were still in force, others that they were abolished. We may therefore infer, that in all parallel cases, the same rule takes place; that is, in all cases, wherein the reason of men and the sincerity of Christians permit them to differ. For can it be imagined that the apostle would, by the direction of God's spirit, give such a solemn decision, upon a debate arising among Christians, wherein he only applies a general rule to a particular case; and yet not intend that the same rule should be applied in other cases exactly parallel, and where the reason of it equally holds? Or can any one think, that in the different judgments and practices of the primitive Christians, about *meats* and *days*, no man, or society of men, should impose on others, but every man ought to be fully *persuaded in his own mind*; and in other things of a like nature, wherein conscience is as much concerned,

cerned, no such freedom was to be allowed? We may therefore, in all such cases, act *with confidence*, according to our *best light*; for 'tis plainly the doctrine of my text, that sincerity, or following our *own persuasion* with the necessary qualifications I have mention'd, will render us acceptable to God, even tho' *that persuasion* should be in itself wrong. The direction was given to the *Jewish* as well as *Gentile* converts, to those who *erred*, as well as those whose judgments were *better inform'd*, and might be safely followed by both: for I can never believe they would be not only *allowed*, but *required* to act according to their *persuasion*, which was indeed an erroneous one, (I mean, that of the *Jews*) if at the same time there was any reason to fear the error of that *persuasion* would be imputed to them, or hinder their acceptance with God.

If it be said, our opinions cannot alter the nature of things, and that God having revealed his will to us, requires our conformity to it, according to *its real meaning* and design, and not according to *our own* mistaken notions; might not the same objection have been made to the apostle in the case which he clearly decides against it? But indeed it is founded on a mistake, as if God did absolutely require of us, as the condition of pleasing him, an infallible certainty in understanding his word, and the strict conformity of our sentiments to the truth. If it were so, how unhappy would the condition be of the best upon earth, since all are liable to errors? And God knows, they are inevitable, whereas he chiefly regards sincerity; and wherever it is found, he approves it. It is the subjection of the soul to the light of conscience, that is, the laws of God, as we understand them, and regulating our actions by it, that pleases God. The determination of the judgment, whether right or wrong, does not depend on our choice, and can be under no law, any further than that we are indispensably bound, upon pain of the divine displeasure,

to

to an impartial examination, and to the regular exercise of our own faculties (as far as that falls within the direction of the mind itself) for discovering and in receiving truth. The apostle has determined this as plainly as words can do it, in the very case of the text, for in the 14th verse he says, *I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself*: there the truth of the matter is declared; as if he had said, the *Jews* indeed have no sufficient reason for observing the distinction of meats; for that is intirely abrogated now under the gospel: but then he adds; *to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean*; tho' his opinion cannot alter the nature of the thing, yet 'tis a rule to him; and in disregarding it, that is, in acting against the light of his conscience, his guilt is as great as if the thing was unclean of itself.

But though I have said what is very evident from the scope and connexion of the apostle's discourse, that in this text, the things wherein our full persuasion is required, are things of an inferior nature, not fundamental doctrines and precepts of Christianity; yet in matters of the highest importance, we cannot possibly be accepted without *persuasion*. To say we could, would be in effect to say, we may be saved by a *mere profession* and a course of external actions, that is, by hypocrisy; which is so far from being true, that on the contrary, nothing is more hateful to God. 'Tis certain indeed, that no man to whom the gospel is declared is an infidel without a crime; but his sin does not consist in the error of his judgment, but in the attachment of his heart to his lusts and worldly interests, whereby he is misled and prejudiced against the truth. And this perfectly agrees to the doctrine of our Saviour himself; who pronounces judgment against unbelievers because of their sin. *He that believeth not, is condemned already**. But in the words

* John iii. 18.

immediately following, he explains the reason of the condemnation, and shews what is the essential malignity of unbelief; *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light; because their deeds were evil**.

I shall, in the third place, *illustrate by some arguments the apostle's doctrine in my text.*

1. Let us attend to what our own understandings will naturally suggest to us on this subject. Religion, according to our most obvious notions of it, is a *reasonable service*, performed to the supreme intelligent Being, who observes the most secret thoughts of his creatures, in order to recompence them. If we should suppose that God does not know, or does not regard the operations of our minds in the homage we pay him, the essential foundations of all duty to him are destroyed; but no one can believe that, who has any fear of God left in his heart. It follows, therefore, that in proportion to the concurring exercise of our rational powers, so is the sincerity and the acceptance of our religious professions and actions. If an external work, which deliberately perform'd, and with consent and presence of mind, would please God, should be done without deliberation and design, it is no more pleasing, nor entitles to a reward, than if it were not at all done, or done by another person. For certainly what God requires, is the obedience of men, that is, of intelligent creatures; to do any thing under the notion of service to him, without the approbation of our understandings, is not to serve him at all, but indeed to affront him, and to debase ourselves beneath the dignity of our nature, by neglecting to improve our reason, which is our greatest excellency, to the most valuable purposes for which it was given us, the glory of our Creator, and our own

* John iii. 19.

happinefs. In affairs of far lefs moment, we find ourfelves obliged to fee with our *own eyes*, and act according to our own *persuafion*; though it may be convenient to confult with perfons reputed wife, the laft determination ftill is in ourfelves, and it cannot be otherwife if we are free agents. Actions done with freedom and underftanding, and they only are human actions, and thofe alone which proceed from a conviction that God requires and approves them, are religious. 'Tis impoffible, by the very frame of our nature, that the laws of God fhould bind us otherwife than as we underftand them; which is fo far true, that *invincible ignorance* difcharges from all obligation to obedience; therefore our *own perfuafion* muft be the immediate foundation upon which we act: and whatever guilt may be in erroneous judgments, as they take their rife from prejudice and infincerity, they are fo far a rule, and to contradict them in practice, is the *greateft profanenefs*; for the divine authority directly obliges the confcience, and he who does not conform himfelf to its light, equally rebels againft God, whether his belief be right or wrong.

2. Tho' it is not properly the defign of the gofpel to teach us this doctrine, becaufe it is a principle of reason and natural religion, which the christian revelation fupposes; yet 'tis evidently agreeable to the fcope of the fcriptures, fo that according to them neither faith nor obedience can be without it. Our bleffed Saviour addrefs'd his instructions to men individually, and call'd upon every one to confider for himfelf, what he was to believe and what to do, that he might be acceptable to God. 'Tis certain, his religion could never have obtain'd in the world any other foot than that of liberty, and a right in every man to conduct himfelf in matters of confcience by the *persuafion of his own mind*; for mankind were almoft univerfally prejudiced againft it, and the fccular and ecclefiaftical powers vehemently oppos'd it.

Now, what should a person do in such a case to whom the gospel was preached? he must either resign his understanding and conscience to be directed by others, or put on a resolution to weigh the pretensions of our Lord impartially, and the arguments which supported them, that so he might believe and profess and practise according to the best light he could attain to: the former of these methods would for ever keep him out of the kingdom of God, and perpetuate his aversion to Christianity; the latter would naturally lead him into it.

Now, may I not venture to affirm that the principle, upon which alone men could become Christians at first, is a good one, a scriptural one, and ought still to be allow'd among Christians, with all its just consequences, and to be applied in all cases in which it bears an application; that is, in all cases wherein conscience is concern'd? For can it be thought our blessed Redeemer would draw men into his service by persuasion only, *the bands of a man*, allowing them the freest exercise of their own understandings, which afterwards they must renounce, and be put under the power of fallible mortals like themselves? or wou'd he have the great essentials of his religion enforc'd only by *persuasion*, and yet allow a rigid imposition in inferior points, wherein an error is infinitely less dangerous, yet in the least of them to act against conviction is *damnable*? We find the apostles after their blessed master's ascension, when by the infallible guidance of the holy spirit which was granted them, they fully instructed the churches in the sublime points of divine revelation, and *leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, went on to perfection*, never us'd any other method, than that of argument and persuasion, leaving every man to judge for himself, and to believe and practise as he had sufficient evidence to determine him. They never forc'd light on *weak believers*, (that is, they never forc'd profes-

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sion against light, for real conviction cannot be forc'd or compelled them by meer authority, but would have the subjects of Christ captivated only by reason; and till they obtain'd a sufficient measure of knowledge, they must be allow'd to follow their own imperfect light, without being upbraided or censured for it. The principal case in which Christians at that time were of different opinions, was that to which my text refers; and here you see the apostle asserts, in the *strongest* terms, the necessity of *personal persuasion*. And this doctrine he teaches uniformly in his other writings. In the epistle to the *Philippians* he speaks to the same purpose, and probably on the same occasion, *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing* *.

3. Every man has, or may have, a sufficient evidence of this in himself. 'Tis commonly and very justly said, that virtue carries its own reward with it, in the inward, sincere joys and satisfaction, which attend the practice of it. This is a sanction which God has added to his laws, arising from the very constitution of our nature; so much the more powerful, because 'tis constant and immediate in its application. No sooner a good action is done, *than a man is satisfied from himself*; pleasure springs up in his mind and a self-applauding joy, which a *stranger cannot intermeddle with*: No sooner a transgression is committed, but presently judgment is pronounc'd, and punishment inflicted in the consuming torments and anguish of a *reproaching heart*. Now the force of these present rewards and punishments, which are one great motive to religion, especially depends on

* Chap. iii. 15, 16.

personal persuasion : For conscience is a *monitor* as well as a judge ; it always gives sentence according to its own light, and not *another's*. No man ever felt any *wounds of spirit* for acting contrary to the decisions and judgments of other men, while he himself was not convinc'd by them, and while he preserv'd a due regard for the light of his own understanding ; no man ever possess'd the comfort of self-approbation, and the *testimony of his conscience*, by complying with the sentiments of others, while he acted against his *own*. This argument, founded on experience, which can never fail, because it necessarily arises even from the make of human nature, is also confirm'd by express texts of scripture. The apostle's *rejoicing was the testimony of his conscience* *. And to the end that others might enjoy the same solid and lasting consolation, he prescribes this general rule, *But let every one prove his own work, and then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another* †. How shall a man have rejoicing in himself by proving his own work, unless he approves it to himself, that is, to the light of his own conscience, *the persuasion of his own mind*?

The great prejudice against this doctrine, is, that it seems to sap the foundations of human authority, at least extremely to weaken it, and narrow its province, by exempting from its jurisdiction all matters of conscience, or whatever may be *so call'd* by men allowed the utmost liberty of judging for themselves ; and if every one may do what is good in his own eyes, how shall order be preserv'd in the world or in the church ? Let us consider this objection impartially : In order to which it may be divided into these propositions, which I think contain the whole sense of it. First, according to the principles I have laid down, matters of conscience are not under human

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Gal. vi. 4.

jurisdiction,

jurisdiction, for if every one ought to act according to the *persuasion of his own mind*, no man is to be determin'd by the decisions of men; and consequently in these cases all are exempted from human authority. Secondly, that every man must judge for himself what is properly a matter of conscience, and is not accountable to, nor can be restrain'd in so judging, by any power on earth. Thirdly, the liberty which this seems to allow, being boundless, for there is not any thing wherein conscience may not be pleaded or pretended; if such a plea be sufficient, it would seem to make void all obligation on subjects to obey any human authority whatsoever. And, to compleat the argument, they represent this as so great an absurdity, that because of it we ought to reject the principle from which it is infer'd. This is the substance of what has been the most plausibly offer'd against the right of every Christian to act according to the *full persuasion of his own mind in matters of conscience*: But I must own it does not appear to me convincing, and of sufficient weight to determine us to depart from a principle which is so evidently founded on scripture and reason. I shall therefore, as a conclusion of this discourse, by considering these propositions I have mentioned, further explain the apostle's rule in my text, and shew how it affects, or seems to affect, the just exercise of human authority, civil and ecclesiastical.

As to the first proposition, namely, *that matters of conscience are not under human jurisdiction*; it is not only a plain consequence from the text, but the very design of it: For the apostle would have no Christians, or society of Christians, pretend to call their brethren to account for their conduct in these things, or exercise any power over them; and for that end he establishes this maxim, that every man ought to be *persuaded in his own mind*; from which it evidently follows, that no man can be safe in a blind submission

to the decision of others, whatever authority they have, or in whatever stations they are placed. If such a submission had been the duty of Christians, why would not the apostles have enjoin'd it, since it must have determin'd all their differences? Why would he not have propos'd so easy an expedient as that their governors should meet in council, and having maturely consider'd the points in controversy, give judgment, in which all ought to acquiesce? Or rather might he not have demand'd an universal obedience to his own apostolical authority? But so far from the least insinuation of any such method for peace, that on the contrary, when in this very chapter he declares his own *persuasion* concerning the matters in debate, which he does in the strongest terms, *I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus there is nothing unclean of itself**, at the same time he allows every man to follow the light of his private judgment. For indeed conscience has a *supremacy* in itself, I mean so far as not to be subject to any *tribunal* upon earth; it acknowledges *no superior* but God, and to him alone it is accountable: If it were otherwise, our obedience would not be to God but to men.

The second proposition, that every man must *judge for himself what is properly a matter of conscience*, is necessarily imply'd in the nature of conscience, and must be allowed, in order to establish to every man the real privilege of following his *own persuasion*. Conscience is nothing else but the judgment of a man concerning himself and his own actions compar'd with the law of God, and as subject to his authority. Now, how is it possible that one man should determine for another, how far this judgment shall extend, and to what instances? To limit and prescribe to it, is, in effect to deny it altogether. If one man

* Ver. 14.

esteemeth (that is, judgeth there is sanctity in) *one day above another, another man esteemeth every day alike*; shall the former of these be decided by the latter and make his opinion a rule, while he is not convinced in *his own mind*? That is really to say, he shall resign his understanding, which is not in any man's power to do; he shall judge and not judge at the same time; he shall believe contradictions. And if others must determine for us what are matters of conscience, our privilege of following our *own light* will be brought into a very *narrow* compass, indeed reduced to a meer shadow: For upon that absurd supposition, what defence can be made against the most grievous usurpations? Those who exercise the most arbitrary authority over the very understandings and consciences of men, have no more to do than declare that the matters wherein they prescribe and give laws, are not matters of conscience, and under that pretence enforce the greatest severities.

It would scarce be necessary to insist on so plain a case, but that this is the very pretence under which all impositions on conscience screen themselves. The name of conscience is sacred and venerable among men, at least among Christians: There are few who will own any such claim as that of dominion over it, or that they make any encroachments on its rights: But then they say it must be circumscrib'd within its proper bounds, and authority must not be sham'd by humour and hypocrisy, under the specious pretence of mens acting according to their private persuasion. Thus some alledge there is a sufficient liberty reserv'd to conscience, if no decisions are made by men against the scriptures rightly understood: Others that human authority in the affairs of religion is only to be exercised in modes and circumstances, in which case the plea of conscience is not to be regarded; for 'tis really groundless. Now to all such pretences, and all invasions of the essen-

tial christian rights of private judgment, however colour'd and disguis'd, I would only oppose the *solemn question* which the apostle puts in the verse preceding my text, *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?* Who but the searcher of hearts can tell whether the plea of conscience is real or not? For men to say it is not, is to enter into the secrets of other mens hearts, and take upon them to judge what God alone can judge. Or, if the meaning be, that against some human decisions there is no real plea of conscience, that is, there is no ground for it; what can this signify, but that in their opinion it is so? But can the opinion of one man, or any number of men, be a rule to another? then we might forsake the apostle's rule, and no more insist on our right to be *every man persuaded in his own mind*.

I cannot but observe that in the debated case among the primitive Christians, to which my text immediately refers, there was as great appearance of reason for neglecting the pretence of conscience, and attributing it to prejudice and obstinate humour, as can well be supposed in any other. What ground had the *Jewish* converts for their alledged *distinction* of days, or for the purity of some *meats*, and the impurity of others; the inspired teachers of Christianity had sufficiently shew'd them all such things were abolish'd, under the gospel; God himself did interpose by many miracles to demonstrate *the power of the word of truth* in opposition to the weakness of the law, and its ceremonies; nay, the apostle does expressly declare his persuasion that *nothing was unclean of itself*. How would imposition triumph, if it had such advantages on its side, and with an impetuous clamour run down all resistance, imputing it to unaccountable peevishness never to be satisfy'd? But the holy apostle was actuated by *another spirit*; he held the right of private judgment to be *sacred* and *inviolable*; that every man's conscience must be a rule to himself, and so far a rule

rule to others, that no encroachments must be made upon it.

The only question now remaining is, thirdly, *Whether this liberty does make void all obligations on subjects to obey human authority.* It must be own'd, agreeably to the principles I have asserted, that no determinations of human power can in any case bind the conscience, which is immediately subject to the authority of God alone. Its voice is to be heard, and its dictates obeyed against all the decrees of men that oppose them; which is really no more than to say, that *God is to be obeyed rather than man.*

'Tis true, that sometimes the laws of God and men coincide, so far as to enjoin the same external actions; and that we are bound to obey the just commands of our superiors, *not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake*; yet it will not follow, that even in these cases human authority binds the conscience; which is apparent from this plain consideration, that the same principle of conscience *equally* obliges us to duties wherein no human power does interpose, as in the relation of equals, and to acts of charity: nay, conscience lays as strict an obligation on rulers to perform their duty to their subjects, as on subjects to obey them. But no more in the one case than in the other, is there any authority *over* conscience: For conscience does *equally* oblige the magistrate to grant the reasonable requests of the subject, and the subject to obey his lawful commands. 'Tis true likewise that there is nothing in the whole compass of human life and affairs, but what may some way fall within the wide province of conscience; and thus far men in whatever station have no right to determine so as by their authority to oblige others. Yet that does not hinder but that some of the same things may in *other respects*, and on *other* accounts, not as matters of conscience, be subject to human superiors, and properly be govern'd by them.

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To set this matter in a clearer light, we ought to consider distinctly the two kinds of human authority; *civil*, and *ecclesiastical*. The first is an *ordinance of man* very agreeable to the will of God, for the excellent purpose of preserving peace and order in civil societies; and must be suppos'd to be furnished with *sufficient powers* for answering that end. But magistrates have no more authority than any of the rest of mankind (that is, they have no proper authority at all) in matters of conscience *as such*; they cannot by their laws oblige their subjects to receive any proposition as a truth of divine revelation, or do any action as a duty to God: For in these cases it is essentially necessary, that we should profess and practise purely out of respect to God; and wherever any pretended weight is added to his authority, in so far as *that* is regarded, it really diminishes from the *sincerity* of obedience, and consequently is a real prejudice to true religion. But this does not in the least impair the magistrate's just power, who has still enough reserv'd for his care, even the whole extent of outward human actions which regard the publick peace. Under that consideration alone they are proper for his cognizance, and he has such an authority as no pleas of conscience can supersede.

As to *ecclesiastical authority*, we cannot judge of the nature and design of it better than by the accounts which the apostles give us of *their own*; for it will scarcely be alledg'd, there is any church power greater than *theirs was*. Now they tell us, they had *no dominion over the faith of Christians*; and consequently *none* over their consciences. For tho' we commonly distinguish *matters of conscience* into matters of *faith* and of *practice*, yet really *faith* extends to the whole compass of duty; for *whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. They (the apostles) expressly say, the *power given them was for edification*; which being the proper end, explains the nature of it. A power for edification is a
power

power to promote truth and sincere religion, which can never be promoted by mens being obliged to act *contrary* to the inward conviction of their own minds, or *without it*; therefore the apostles must be understood to have disclaimed any authority obliging Christians in such a manner. And from hence we may see the just limits of church-power: its decisions bind the conscience as far as men are convinc'd, and no farther; any higher claim of authority not only cannot be inferr'd from the *design* of *ecclesiastical power*, according to the scriptures, namely, edification, but indeed is utterly inconsistent with it.

I do not speak of that which is not only the right, but the indispensable duty of christians, to separate from the fellowship of those *who are called brethren, and walk disorderly*, that is, as the apostle describes them, *Fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, extortioners* *; or who in any other like instances notoriously transgress the *plain* and *essential* precepts of Jesus Christ: For the apostle exhorts the *Corinthians* to *put away* the incestuous person *from among them*; and asserts their right (which is the common right of all Christian churches) so far as to *judge them that are within*. This power, which really is of *self-preservation, in so far as it affects* the guilty, can only punish their scandals, not their sins; and has of itself no other *proper* and *immediate* tendency than to produce an external reformation, not real religion, which wholly depends on the authority of God, and the motives of another world. But will it at all follow, that because we ought to deny the tokens of Christian communion to those who *sin against their light*, and are *self-condemn'd*, therefore we should also deny them to such as walk according to their light, tho' different from ours in points that are not *essential*? Because the rules of the gospel direct us to sepa-

* 1 Cor. ver. 11.

rate from those who are openly scandalous and profligate in their lives, doing those things which the *common sense* of mankind condemns; therefore we may also separate from such as differ from us, in things wherein the reason of men and the sincerity of Christians *permit* them to differ? In the *former* of these cases, the apostle requires the *Corinthians* not so much as to eat with the dissolute and immoral: In the *latter*, the apostle requires the *Romans* to receive the weak into the greatest intimacies of their religious fellowship. Or finally, because to preserve the external purity of a visible church, marks of disgrace are put on such abominable actions, (agreeably to the general prevailing sentiments of mankind, who have annexed honour and dishonour to the actions which have the outward appearance of virtuous and vicious) can it be justly inferr'd that *mere ecclesiastical authority* is sufficient to determine points of conscience, so that any thing shall commence good or bad, duty or sin, only by its declarations, and a man may rest satisfied in them without the *persuasion of his own mind*?

I confess such as are of opinion that any man or society of men have any such authority lodg'd in their hands by our Lord Jesus Christ, not only may, but are bound to acquiesce in *their* determinations: And like this probably was the case of the *Judaizing Christians*, who observ'd some days, and other ceremonies, *merely* on the score of tradition, which during their weakness was a rule to them. But this is so far from proving that *ecclesiastical power* does *properly* and *of itself* bind the conscience, that indeed it demonstrates the contrary: For in all such cases the only foundation upon which a man can act conscientiously, is his *private persuasion*; it limits and circumscribes the extent of human authority, and is not limited and circumscribed by it. If a decision of men binds any person, 'tis in matters wherein he thinks they

they have power : When they carry their pretensions farther, determine things wherein his judgment does not allow their authority, their decrees must be regarded *by him* as void ; and consequently if any one's conscience disallows human authority in the lowest instances wherein 'tis exercised, its acts can produce no obligation upon him ; else the rights of private judgment may be invaded in all cases, and conscience given up to the will of men : For it is as really injur'd if a man be forced to act *against* its light in a *circumstance*, as in an *article of faith* ; and in the least things, he *that doubts is damn'd*, if he complies. From all which it is apparent, that *ecclesiastical authority* has no power over conscience ; indeed none at all but what conscience *gives* it, and therefore must yield to *its superior*, whenever their voices differ.

The direction given to the *Corinthians*, *Let all things be done decently, and in order**, is alledged by many to be a sufficient foundation for the church's power in points of external order. But what those points are, even protestants are not agreed : Some extend them to *ceremonies* and *modes* of worship, which are neither expressly commanded nor forbidden in the word of God ; others limit them to the *natural circumstances* of actions : Upon these different opinions, different schemes of *ecclesiastical constitutions* are erected. Without entering into this debate, I shall only make some remarks to explain that text, as far as it has any relation to my present subject ; whereby it will appear, that no proper authority, however limited in some Christians, binding others *against* or *without* the *persuasion of their own minds*, is founded upon it.

First, the rule is prescribed to the members of the *Corinthian* church, concerning themselves and their own actions, and no authority committed to *some* over *others*. The same persons who had been guilty of

* 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

the disorders and indecencies, mentioned in the preceding part of the chapter, are in the conclusion required to do all things *decently and in order*; not the least insinuation, as if the governors of the church were entrusted to execute the apostle's precept, far less that they were to be the *sole judges* of what is decent, and the people *indispensably* oblig'd to submit to their determination. Common sense itself and discretion (setting aside the christian virtues, which will incline men to a regular behaviour in all things) are *sufficient* to secure the *outward decorum* of assemblies, which only the apostle is there speaking of; and there is no need of a *proper jurisdiction*. He does not so much as once mention authority, nor at all enforce his direction by it; but all along argues from such plain reasons as all are equally judges of.

Again, there is not in *that chapter, nor any where else* in scripture, either precept or example for excommunications, or any other *ecclesiastical censures* to be inflicted for what the *church may think* indecent, or what is really *in itself* so. These are things of an inferior nature, not to be put in balance with the weightier matters of religion. The apostle in the same epistle exhorts the *Corinthians* to avoid the infectious company of scandalous persons; and when one in their communion was guilty of *incest*, they must *purge out the old leaven*; but for irregularities in their congregations, tho' those they committed were very gross, he contents himself with advising them to reform; not a word of rejecting the guilty, or debarring them from *any part* of Christian communion, therefore *ecclesiastical power* in matters of *decency and order* must be persuasive only; since, according to the laws of Jesus Christ, its appointments have no sanctions added to them.

It is of dangerous consequence for the church to lay *too great stress* on points of apprehended order, as if they were *equal* to the great christian virtues; and transgressors

transgressors against the *one* and the *other* to be treated after the *same manner* ; for thus men are led to over-value things which are insignificant in comparison, and place a great deal of religion in them, or to disesteem the very vitals of Christianity, as if they were not more important than the *arbitrary* and *variable* actions of *human* contrivance, or the more uncertain appointments of *human* prudence.

And lastly, let it be considered how a *proper* and *absolute* authority in *some* Christians to determine and oblige *others* to submit to their determinations in points of order, can consist with the right of private judgment, which belongs to all Christians, and which protestants zealously contend for, as the *essential principle* of the *reformation*. For let us suppose, that governors make a decree pursuant to the powers they claim, and the persons affected by it *cannot* in conscience comply, or *declare* they cannot; either authority must stop, or conscience be trampled on; either *some* must judge for *others*, what is a point of mere order to be submitted to, and what is a *sinful imposition* to be resisted; and who dare trust them, unless he knows they are infallible? or else, every man must judge for himself: The *former* is a popish principle, the *latter* destroys a proper ecclesiastical power, which shall bind conscience *even* in the matters of *order* and *decency*.

And now, to conclude: Since it is so evident that our Lord Jesus Christ has not only granted all his disciples the privilege, but strictly enjoin'd them to enquire into his will revealed in the gospel, that from thence they may learn what to believe and what to practise, and without submitting implicitly to *human declarations* and decisions in any point of *faith* or *duty*, may by following impartially their own light, the full *persuasion of their own minds*, obtain his approbation: Let us use this privilege and obey this precept, having always a *close* and *immediate* regard to him; and

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as being accountable to him only, not to men: Let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith he hath made us free: Let us call no man or society of men our masters; for one is our master even Christ, and all we are brethren. On this foundation alone we shall have confidence towards him, and boldness in the day of judgment.

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DISCOURSE XXVI.

The DELUSIVE and BLOODY SPIRIT of
P O P E R Y.

A SERMON preached in the presence, and by the appointment, of the Synod of *Perth* and *Sterling*, October, 1754.

[FORDYCE.]

REV. xviii. 23, 24.

—By thy Sorceries were all Nations deceived; and in her was found the Blood of Prophets, and of Saints, and of all that were slain upon the Earth.

THESE emphatical words exhibit to us the two principal features of a very surprising picture; which we find in this book of *Revelation*, representing a monstrously delusive and persecuting power, that was to make its appearance in some after-period. This terrible power hath always been understood by the best interpreters of scripture to be none other than that of *the church of Rome*, long ago established under the pretence of an authority purely spiritual, but still applied to purposes the most different imaginable. And indeed, whoever shall compare the picture itself with the state of the world for many ages past, in relation to religion, will,

I doubt not, be obliged to own, that it is as compleat and characteristic a representation of *Popery*, in its most flourishing times, as could possibly have been given, had "that mother of abominations" actually existed, when she was shadowed out to the prophetic mind of our apostle.

The chapter in which our text lies presents us with a lively prophecy of the ruins of the church of *Rome* in some future time, as published by three *angelic* voices. The first declares the *certainly* of that ruin, the second the *extremity* of it, and the third its *irrecoverableness*; assigning withal the reasons of a retribution so awful, *viz.* her spiritual *witchcraft*, and her shocking *cruelty*; both are very strongly expressed in the words before us: "For by thy *sorceries* were "all nations deceived; and in her was found the "blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that "were slain upon the earth."

The last expressions require no paraphrase. They are dreadfully intelligible. The first are explained by the apostle Paul, where speaking of *the man of sin* that was to be revealed, in a strain which corresponds surprisingly with the apostle John's description, he saith, that this *son of perdition* was to "come with all "deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish;" an energetic *hebraism*, which seems to intimate not only that the grand apostate then spoke of should erect and maintain his kingdom by the most impious frauds, but that he should destroy the souls of men by numberless ungodly arts of rendering them religious *without* religion; I mean, deluding them with a fond opinion of their piety, whilst guilty of the greatest enormities, and then, by the most fatal kind of magic, making them dream of paradise on the very verge of hell.

It is in the latter point of light that we propose to view the *sorceries* of this wicked inchantress. After which we will look a little, and but a little, (it is a spectacle of horror!) at that scene of *blood*, where she stalks

stalks along with infernal fury, drunk with her slaughter of the almighty's servants, and boasting of her zeal for the almighty's interests. From both surveys, so mournful to religion and humanity, we will then turn our eyes, with joyful and grateful admiration, to our own highly-favoured state, and afterwards apply the whole.

First, We are to take a view of the *sorceries* of the church of Rome, or of those pleasing but destructive delusions, by which she cheats her votaries into a persuasion of their safety, at the same time that she leaves them "in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity;" nay, that she makes them sevenfold more the children of the devil than she found them. To lead the more regularly to this part of the subject, let us take things from the beginning, even as far back as the earliest notices we have of the history of the universe.

Now we gather from the sacred records, that the *Eternal* having formed innumerable hosts of glorious and happy creatures, to be the first and highest subjects of his government, whole legions of those rose in rebellion, and became degenerate and miserable beings, whose sole employment and delight it was to do mischief amongst the works of God; and that accordingly *Satan*, the head of the revolt, found means to draw into it the creature *Man*, whom the creator had new-made, and placed in a state of innocence and bliss. Thus he introduceth on *our* earth a kingdom of his own, in opposition to the kingdom of *Jehovah*. But the great and good governor of the world, who "loveth righteousness, and hateth "iniquity," resolves to overthrow this insolent adversary, and, taking pity on the new race, whom the malicious and artful spirit had contrived to ruin, he is graciously pleased to promise, that "the seed of "the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent." He fulfils his promise: "In the fulness of time he "sends forth his son made of a woman," with

ample authority and qualifications to subdue the original apostate, to reduce deluded men to their duty, and by that means to restore them to their primitive felicity. In short, "the Son of God is manifested to destroy the works of the devil."

In prosecution of this noble design, worthy of the perfect rectitude and benevolence of its author, our deliverer doth no sooner appear on the public theatre, than he openly proclaims war with the powers of darkness, after having privately baffled the personal assaults of their prince. He raiseth, so to speak, a standard of truth and goodness in the name and on the behalf of his *Father*. He calls upon his unhappy *brethren* of mankind, to throw down the weapons of this unnatural rebellion, and to follow *him*. He publisheth a general indemnity. He pardons, entertains, encourages all that come over to him. He leads them on against the common enemy. He makes them "more than conquerors." How? Not indeed by external might, or worldly power, but by the majesty and the energy of *his religion*. In *it* he proposeth such a plan, as, if truly understood, and steadily followed, cannot fail to recover men from ignorance and corruption; and, by illuminating their minds, and purifying their hearts, to make them "partakers of a divine nature," and subjects of the great empire of light and love.—Yes, my brethren, it is the glory of the *christian system*, that its precepts, prohibitions, doctrines, and examples, are all directly calculated for the restoration and perfection of human nature, as might be shewn at large, were it necessary. It is *not* necessary. Those with whom we are concerned in the present argument, agree with all professing Christians, that the *gospel* is "a doctrine according to *godliness*," and immediately adapted to promote it.

But now, we say, that *they* have so adulterated that doctrine, as to pervert it entirely from its genuine nature and original use, "making void the command-

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"mandments of God, by the traditions of men." We say, that in place of *the mystery of godliness*, they have framed and adopted *a mystery of iniquity*; an astonishing compound of wicked opinions and wicked observances, suited to keep men in ignorance and corruption, and, by nameless flattering illusions, to conceal from them their danger. In a word, we say, that the system of Popery is a direct apostacy from the religion of Christ; and the practice of Popery, a direct revolt from the kingdom of Christ; and all this under the impudent pretext of its alone retaining that religion, and alone defending that kingdom.

It is thus that we explain, at least in part, the prediction relating to the *dragon's* giving her power to the *beast*. We consider the church of Rome as the principal retainer, or prime minister, if I may be indulged the phrase, to the prince of the dark kingdoms; employed and supported by *him*, and in return upholding and propagating *his* dominion over "the children of disobedience," who are dazzled with a phantom of liberty, whilst "they are taken captive by him at his pleasure."

We would not be understood to mean by this, that all are slaves to *Satan*, who are votaries of *Rome*. God forbid. It were strange want of understanding not to allow a possibility of being pious or virtuous in that communion, corrupt as undoubtedly it is. It were equal want of candour not to acknowledge, that it hath in fact produced many persons of unquestionable piety and virtue, and some who have soared, perhaps, as noble heights in the spiritual life, as ever were attained by uninspired mortality. This, I think, is certain, that a man may be mistaken, greatly mistaken, in many things relating to his religious *principles*, and yet be perfectly sincere in his religious *practice*. The goodness of his affection, the strictness of his education, the influence of those truths which he retains, and the assistance of that grace, which is never denied to the conscientious, may well be sup-

posed sufficient to overballance for the ill effects even of tenets exceedingly erroneous. It is manifestly the judgment of an *apostle*, formed in consequence of an heavenly vision, vouchsafed him on purpose to overcome his prejudices on that very subject, that there are persons to be found, "who fear God and work righteousness in every nation;" — in *every* nation, and of course, under *every* form and aspect of religion. We *Protestants* condemn the church of Rome for her want of charity. Let us never imitate her in the most *anti-christian* of all dispositions.

But, nevertheless, we cannot help still thinking that the native tendency, I say the *native* tendency of her religious system is to make men *irreligious* under a specious mask of *zeal*, or to lead them to pursue an *imaginary* righteousness to the neglect of a *real* one. This we affirm in general, and we endeavour to prove what we affirm, from the whole composition and genius of popery. At present we can only give a sample of our proofs, with respect to some particulars; from which, however, it will not be difficult to judge of the rest.

Christianity, we all know, aims immediately at the *heart*; that is, sets itself to reform and regulate the inward man in the first instance. As its *morality* points chiefly to internal purity, being all refined yet solid; so its *ritual* leads directly to internal devotion, being alike simple and expressive. It pronounceth the highest beatitude to "the pure in heart," and promiseth the divine acceptance to those only "who worship in spirit and in truth." It prescribes no pompous ceremonies. It prohibits all ostentatious services. In short, it calls off the attention of its disciples from whatever is merely mechanical, formal, or fanciful in religion, to whatever is moral, vital, and substantial. Now *popery* doth just the reverse. It introduceth an endless train of senseless and silly, yet shewy and sanctimonious observances; the parade of which plays so perpetually on the popular imagination,

gination, as to leave neither leisure nor disposition for minding any thing more rational or more real. So many sacraments, fasts, and festivals, however superfluous, absurd, and burdensome; such indefatigable saying and hearing of prayers, though in an unknown tongue; such continual crossings and counting of beads, though perfectly childish; such external grimaces and bowing to images, though rank idolatry; all this, and a great deal more of the same kind, being mixed up with infinite solemnity, doth so intoxicate the unguarded populace, that they fancy themselves wonderfully devout and holy for being out of measure superstitious.

Their designing or deluded priests fail not, in the mean time, to forward the pleasing drunkenness by their writings and discourses, as well as by all the insinuation of private address, till they have inflamed the vulgar mind into the most passionate admiration and transporting pride of a certain plausible *exterior*, totally distinct from true religion, and in effect exclusive of it. To prevent their inebriated followers from turning sober, and so discovering the deceit, they take care to keep them in profound ignorance, and to inculcate upon them as a fundamental maxim, that such *ignorance is the mother of devotion*. To make all sure, they hide from them the *scriptures*, which were given to make men good and wise to salvation. Those scriptures which all are concerned to know, those very scriptures, which *Christ* himself commands all to search, *Christ's* pretended *vicar* forbids all to search, excepting the *clergy*. So that if any layman, desirous of being ascertained concerning his Maker's will, presumes to look into his Maker's word, without permission from the bishop or inquisitor; or without the advice of the minister or confessor, or even after all this without a licence in form, he cannot receive absolution for his sins, and for this grievous sin amongst the rest, unless he first surrender up his *bible* to the ordinary.

Having thus shut out the broad day-light of heaven, and set up in lieu of it the miserable taper of human

authority, often deceitful and always uncertain, the cursed magician of Rome hath the fairest opportunity to work his spells, and call up what spectres of superstition he pleaseth, in order to awe and impose on the staring multitude. I think I see him, like some frightful *conjuror* in a gloomy cell, with all his symptoms of deceit about him, pretended reliques, real images, fictitious saints, false legends, and forged traditions, playing innumerable tricks with the souls of men, and bewitching them into all manner of idolatrous, detestable, and damnable practices; exactly agreeable to that strong description of him already referred to, in which the apostle Paul, speaking in the anticipating stile of prophecy, hath these remarkable words; “whose coming is after the working of
“fatan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.” Such is the person——
Eternal God!——*such* is the person who pretends to be like *Thee* infallible, the sovereign judge of truth, and the unerring guide of Christians! Unhappy souls, that are under the guidance of such a man;——of a man too, who hath been declared “subject to no
“law, but by the plenitude of his power entitled to
“make right wrong, and wrong right; to make
“virtue vice, and vice virtue; to dispute with all
“laws human and divine; and to do all things above
“law, without law, and against law.” With what peculiar propriety doth the apostle, the most masterly of all writers, term this impudent impostor, *that wicked one*, or *lawless person*, as the original word doth signify; and still more emphatically, *the man of sin*, *the son of perdition*.

Such hath he always been in his *public* character; in his *private* one he hath often, God knows, been very little better:——Very little better, did I say? were there ever such execrable monsters upon earth, as many of the *popes* have been; whose names are infamous to this day, for perfidy, for cruelty, for lust,

lust, for infidelity, for blasphemy, for every brutal, every diabolical excess, that can outrage heaven, or shock humanity? I appeal to the testimony of their own historians. I appeal to the confession of the keenest advocates for popery. And could those very monsters——oh stupendous impiety! oh unparalleled effrontery!——those very monsters could call themselves *the representatives of Jesus Christ*, of that adorable personage, “God manifested in the flesh,” who whilst he preached to mankind the divine life, was himself a perfect model of it, the immediate “beam” of his Father’s glory, and the express image of “his person.” What pestilent effects must it needs produce on the manners of a religious society, to have such reverend profligates, such abandoned impostors at the head of it; more especially considering their extraordinary influence and vast domination; indeed their *example* alone, in such circumstances, must be infinitely pernicious.

Nor is the matter at all mended by the example of many of their *saints*, whose principal recommendation to the honour of *sainthood*, appears from history to have been often transcendant flagitiousness, or transcendant frenzy; so that *they* were complimented with a distinguished place in *heaven*, who were unworthy or unfit to live on *earth*. And those canonized wretches are held up as patterns of imitation, nay, as objects of adoration, as well as the first favourites and privy counsellors of the Almighty, and powerful intercession with him, for their mortal brethren. Now I submit it to the meanest understanding, what sort of impression it must necessarily make on ignorant or enthusiastic minds, to be taught that persons may be, and actually have been, exalted to the highest imaginable dignity in the *other* world, for committing the greatest imaginable *villainy* in *this*; and withal, to be worked up by all the machinery of superstition to the most sacred veneration for such odious characters.

After

After what hath been said, we need wonder the less, though still we must wonder, at the abominable artifices the roman church hath fallen upon, to assure men of *heaven* without a single grain of *holiness*, provided they will pay *her* sufficiently for their admission. Our master who came from thence declares, that none can enter there, but by the strait gate, and the narrow way of real regeneration, efficacious faith, and persevering obedience. His apostles preach the self-same doctrine. It is the ground-work of his whole religion: And to engage men effectually “to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, looking for the blessed hope,” is the very superstructure intended to be raised on it by the grace of the gospel. Now the roman church overturns this glorious fabric of *evangelic virtue* at once, by sapping the foundation of it; I mean, by persuading men, that such virtue is *not* necessary to their salvation, but may be supplied and superseded by a variety of other methods, much more agreeable to their inclinations, in short, perfectly consistent with all their vices. And here there opens such a scene, such a gulf of delusion and perdition: — Pilgrimages, penances, purgatory, prayers for the dead, prayers to the saints, auricular confession, extreme unction, masses without number, an inexhaustible bank of merit; and, above all the rest, indulgences, pardons and dispensations, as many, and as large, as can be desired by men, or purchased for money!

Indeed these last may be considered as a main pillar of that amazing structure of wickedness, which *Popery* hath erected on the ruins of *Christianity*. It is abundantly notorious, that there is fixed in a public office at Rome a rate for sins, according to the nature and degree of each, where the most heinous and horrible are not excepted, even the breach of oaths the most solemn and important, the murder of a parent, or the debauching of a sister. — Quake, oh earth! tremble, ye heavens! and all ye stars withdraw your
tremble,

shining!—The infamy stops not here. It is alike notorious, that the *Pope* for a larger sum grants indulgences for many generations, sometimes for thousands of years together.—Need I mention, after this, the open traffic of pardons and dipensations, that was carried on in *Germany* by those—what shall I call them?—Those spiritual pedlars, or hawkers, the strolling *friars*, whose unheard-of abuses in retailing them, gave rise to the blessed *reformation*.

And what, my brethren, is the natural language of the popish doctrine and practice in this particular?—
 “ Are you strongly inclined to any sin whatever, you
 “ need not restrain yourself at all, go to the *priest*,
 “ and he will give you an *indulgence*. Have you
 “ been actually guilty of any sin whatever; make
 “ yourself intirely easy, go to the *priest*, and he
 “ will give you *absolution*. Never fear, man,
 “ you may perpetrate the blackest crimes, and be
 “ absolved for payment; or even without it, on per-
 “ forming some trifling ceremony of unsanctified
 “ devotion.” Now, to make men believe that they
 may thus indulge to any wickedness, or every wickedness, with perfect safety for the next world, as well as for this, is such a master-piece of devilish policy for destroying human souls by multitudes, is such an enormous delusion of hell, that I can find no size of words to clothe the bulk of it. “ Let it go *naked*
 “ then, that men may see it the better;” to borrow the expression of a favourite author, on a different occasion.

Thus have we considered some of the chief ingredients of that enchanting “ cup full of abominations” with which the mighty sorcerers of Rome deceives her unhappy adherents, and which accounts indeed but too well for that spritual blindness and desperate profligacy, which raged like an universal and deep contagion, through all the popish countries. Yet all this is but a part of her wickedness. For whilst “ she makes the inhabitants of the earth drunk
 “ with the wine of her fornication, she herself is
 “ blood

“ drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the
 “ blood of the martyrs of Jesus;” or, as it is in our
 text, “ In her was found the *blood* of prophets and
 “ of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”
 Which you will remember was

The *second* thing we proposed to consider briefly.
 Now, I say, that this sanguinary prostitute, not con-
 tented with ruining the *souls* of those who are seduced
 by her, thirsts to murder the *bodies* of those who
 are not. And accordingly, armed with *bulls* in one
 hand, and *faggots* in the other, provided with an hor-
 rid apparatus of axes, racks, and gibbets, and ac-
 companied with an hideous train of holy executioners,
 “ she goes forth to make war with the saints, and to
 wear them out;” and she pretends——oh tremen-
 dous blasphemy!——she pretends to go forth in the
 name and cause of the prince of *peace*, “ who came
 “ not to destroy mens lives, but to save them;”
 whose spirit is peace, whose legacy is peace, whose
 whole gospel is no other than “ glad tidings of peace
 “ on earth, and good-will towards men.”

Such a spirit, such a legacy, and such a gospel be-
 came *him*, who, as we observed before, descended
 from the bosom, and appeared on the behalf of the
 God of peace, and the parent of mankind, in order
 to defend and enlarge the kingdom of righteousness
 and peace. Satan, the adversary of God and man,
 having as was already hinted, laid the foundations of
 an opposite kingdom, subversive of the interests of
 both, he labours to support and extend it, not only
 in person, but by his *agents* on earth and in hell.
 Of all his agents on *earth*, we maintain that the
 dreadful power we are describing is the most assidu-
 ous and the most successful. We maintain, that in
 managing this work, he sustains, like his master, a
 double character, that of a *deceiver*, and that of a
murderer. The first we have endeavoured to make
 appear. For the second, we appeal to all history.
 And here a whole cloud of witnesses presents to us
 an astonishing and wounded fight.—I imagine I

see

see the souls of those that have been slain by that sanctified butcher “for the testimony of Jesus,” and slain under pretence of zeal for that amiable name; I imagine I see them rising up in millions, and hear them crying out with a voice that shakes the pillars of heaven, “How long, oh Lord, holy “and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our “blood on them that dwell upon the earth,” and on that blood-thirsty city?

Let impartial *history* recount——if she *can* recount, the numbers of God’s creatures that have been murdered in God’s name by that bloody impostor.

Let history tell of the carnage committed in the many holy wars.—The *holy wars*!——undertaken for the extirpation of *infidels*.

Let her tell of the cruel proceedings against the *Protestants* in *Hungary*, in *France*, in *Flanders*, in *Germany*, in *Bobemia*, in the *Palatinate*, and many other parts.

Let her tell of the fires in *Smithfield*, particularly in the reign of *Mary of England*; of the *Armada* of *Spain*, in the reign of *Elizabeth*; of the *Gunpowder-plot*, in the reign of *James* the first; a conspiracy truly worthy of hell and *Rome*!

Let her relate the massacre of *Paris* on *St. Bartholemew’s* day, in which about thirty thousand *Protestants* were butchered in cold blood*.

Let her relate too the massacre of *Ireland*, in the reign of *Charles* the first, in which about an hundred and fifty thousand *protestants*; I say, above an hundred and fifty thousand protestants were barbarously murdered in the space of two months,

* It is worthy our observation, that no sooner did the news of this day’s dreadful work arrive at *Rome*, than the *Pope* went in procession to the church of *St. Lewis*, and there returned public and solemn thanks for it to the merciful parent and saviour of men. And the same shocking scene was represented in a splendid picture, with this inscription, THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH.

chiefly by the *popish* priests. And let the same faithful hand paint the slaughter of about forty millions of poor *Americans*; I say, about forty times ten hundred thousand poor *Americans*, on pretence of their resisting the attempts made for their conversion, as well as on accounts purely political.

And let *her* pencil draw, if it can find adequate colours, the horrors of that infernal slaughter house, the *Inquisition*; where all that the imagination of *demons* can invent, or the malignity of *demons* inflict, to insult and torture, and if possible to damn the miserable victim, is practised in terrible perfection.

Let history proceed to rehearse—But *nature* sickens at the story.—*Religion* turns away her ear with abhorrence, and groans for her suffering and bleeding children!—Let us hasten to a more comfortable theme. Let us speak, as we promised to do,

In the *third* place, of that glorious deliverance wrought for these nations from the *delusion* and *persecution* of *popery*; which *your* piety, my reverend fathers and brethren hath taken care to preserve the particular remembrance of, within your immediate circle, by appointing discourses relative to it to be preached before you from time to time. The appointment with which you have honoured *me* on this head, I now obey with pleasure. I rejoice with *you*, and all the friends of *religion* and *liberty*, in the noble triumphs obtained by both at the blessed periods of the *reformation* and the *revolution*. I rejoice with the whole kingdom of light, in the happy victories *then* gained by the combined powers of *Christianity* and *public* zeal. Adored be that all-inspiring and all-supporting *providence*, which raised up and carried on, with a spirit truly wonderful, those *religious* and *civil* heroes, who made so illustrious a stand for the interests of truth and of mankind!

Would your time permit, with what delight could we enter into the detail, and point out to your admiring

miring view, that honourable band of first *reformers*, who, throwing off their mental fetters, broke from the dungeon of *popish superstition*, led forth *the everlasting gospel*, long defaced and imprisoned there, displayed her in her antient honours, and raised her banner before the nations; proclaiming, as "the captain of salvation" himself had done formerly, proclaiming in *his* name, "liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to them that were bound, proclaiming the acceptable year of the lord." Immediately after we might shew you multitudes who had been sleeping in their chains, and dreaming they were free, awaking at the animating call, wondering at the enchantment that had held them so long, bursting their bonds asunder, marching out into open day; the open day of *evangelic light*, and all exulting in "the glorious liberty of the Son of God."

By the way, when we talk with such high approbation of those excellent persons who first set on foot this wondrous work, we do not pretend once to insinuate, that they were guilty of nothing weak, or of nothing wrong in their manner of conducting it. Great *failings*, it hath often been observed, are nearly allied to great *virtues*. When the spirits of men are sharpened by debate, and stimulated by opposition, it is certain that even the wisest and best will betray an unbecoming keenness, and be hurried into miscarriages, which, in a calmer hour and milder mood, they would *condemn exceedingly*. The danger is considerably increased by a particular kind of warm and daring *enthusiasm*, which fires and rouses them, when engaged in any difficult important *struggle*; and which, whilst it comes in aid of the cooler principles of piety, and the feebler dictates of reason, that were insufficient *alone* to carry them through, is apt withal at times to abuse them. And where is the man who can answer for himself, that in a similar conjuncture he could be sure of escaping the snare? But to return:

I might

I might even proceed to represent to you that distinguished *deliverer* of immortal name, who when the fiend of *Popery*, and his kindred devil *tyranny*, were fast regaining their sway in these *islands*, from whence they had been happily expelled, came with the most distinguished and heroic zeal, and drove them back again to *Rome*, their native abode, and chosen seat of empire.

And lastly, I might remind you, how after a new attempt to recover their dominion, they were baffled, I hope for ever baffled, by the *accession* of a family to the *British* throne, that hath been always noted for its inviolable attachment to the joint cause of *reformation* and *liberty*, for its invincible abhorrence of all usurpation over the consciences and rights of mankind, and for a set of *princes* equally adorned with bravery, integrity, and true humanity.

To whom, my beloved brethren, and honoured fathers, to whom shall we ascribe all these marvellous events, and the unspeakable felicity, which as *Men*, as *Christians*, and as *Britons*, we enjoy in consequence of them? I ask once more to whom? You reply with rapture, the rapture of undissembled gratitude, to the *all-wise*, the *all-mighty*, and the *all-merciful*. True indeed, “If it had not been the *Lord* who was on our side, may we of *Israel* say, if it had not been the “*Lord* who was on our side, when men rose up “against us, they had swallowed us up quick, when “their wrath was kindled against us.—Blessed be “the *Lord*, who hath not given us a prey to their “teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the “snare of the fowler. The snare is broken, and we “are escaped. Our help is in the name of the *Lord*, “who made heaven and earth.”

Let us indulge the transports which these reflections and these acknowledgments are fitted to inspire. But yet there is something occurs to damp our joy, though not to diminish our praise. Shall I mention it.—I am sorry to mention it.—You may guess,

I mean

I mean our neglect, was misimprovements of our mercies. *Such* deliverances! *such* privileges! Yet *such* insensibility! *such* abuse!——I appeal to you, are we not really the most favoured people upon earth, and the most ungrateful?——As to the particulars of our ingratitude, they are——But I will spare myself the painful task of specifying them, and will wind up what hath been already said, with a short illustration and improvement of the whole.

For this purpose, suppose that a sensible and serious stranger, from some remote region of the world, an intelligent and virtuous *heathen*, for example, no idolater, but a natural religionist, whose soul was open to truth, and endowed with goodness; just such another man as *Cornelius* seems to have been before he became a *Christian*; suppose, I say, that this man, led by the love of observation and enquiry, was to visit the *European* countries; and, after acquiring the necessary languages, was to traverse first of all the land of *Popery*, and to view the aspect which *that* religion wears, and the effects which it produceth: what do you imagine would be his astonishment and disgust, when he found the *priests* requiring and commanding the *people*, under the pain of exquisite tortures in this world, and of consummate misery in the next, to believe the most monstrous absurdities and contradictions, to swallow the grossest lies and blasphemy, and to revere, to imitate, to worship as *saints* and *gods*, some of the worst and vilest of mankind, as well as to practise without end, the merest foppery and futility, in place of real religion and morality; nay, directly undermining the foundations of all religion and morality, by encouraging men to sin with the assurance of a pardon, whenever they please to purchase one; in a word, inculcating in the name of the *thrice Holy*, such tenets, and such practices, as are almost beyond the very refuse of *Paganism*, and denouncing in the same infinitely venerable name, death and damnation against all who

will not fall down and worship the image which *they* have set up! How would his amazement and horror be heightened, when looking into history, he understood what dismal fields of blood, and hellish engines of torment, this church did boast of, as the noblest proofs of her piety and zeal! How would our honest *beathen* burn with indignation at *such* a church! and with what impatience would he break away from such a land of *abominations*!

Suppose him now to bend his course to *Great-Britain*; to observe in general, the plain, good-natured, manly face of the *religion* taught and professed in it, and upon enquiry to be particularly instructed, by any of its most rational and worthy teachers, concerning the divine original, the heavenly nature, and the excellent tendency of that religion. Suppose him next to consider the *political* state of the country, to contemplate its freedom, its wealth, its independence; and to be informed how all these do naturally grow out of the frame of its *government*, as a government of *laws*, of laws enacted by the *people*, and maintained by the *prince*; by a prince who is at this very time the *father* of his people. After this, let him look once more into history, and there read by what strangely merciful interpositions of heaven *this religion* and *this government* have been restored and secured, when both have been in danger of being extinguished. Oh, my brethren, what emotions of delight and admiration may we conceive would fill the breast of our sensible and virtuous stranger on this complex survey!—But how would these be mingled with sentiments of the sincerest regret and displeasure, when after all he came to look more attentively into the *character* and *manners* of this greatly-favoured nation, and to discover the corruption that runs through all ranks from the court down to the cottage, appears amongst them in every shape, and sadly obscures those

only the *good*

good qualities and commendable actions which their religion and liberty inspire!

And now at last, suppose him whilst full of these different reflections and feelings, to address a mixed and numerous auditory, consisting like this of *clergy* and *people*, may we not figure to ourselves, that he would express himself in some such manner as the following—

“Thrice happy *Britons*, if you had understanding
 “to know, and virtue to improve your happiness!—
 “Your *religion* appears in itself divine: Why would
 “you disgrace it by practices unworthy of it? Would
 “you display its excellency to strangers, let it be seen
 “in excellent lives. You have departed from the
 “*tenets*, depart from the *spirit of popery*. Let your
 “*devotion* be solid and humble, your *charity* large and
 “active. Let *temperance* and *integrity* be your un-
 “divided companions, and the disinterested love of
 “*truth* your inseparable guide.—Honour and de-
 “fend your *king* and your *laws*, both of them the
 “best on the face of the earth. For shame, *Britons*,
 “do not shew yourselves undeserving of both, by
 “acting or speaking against either; guard solici-
 “tously against every incroachment, against every at-
 “tempt of *Rome* and of *France*; they are your natural
 “foes.—Think on the days that are past, and
 “adore that propitious Providence, which hath de-
 “livered you from a thousand dangers, and blessed
 “you in a thousand ways. You are surely the most
 “*privileged* of all people; expect to be the most
 “*accursed*, if you are not the most grateful and
 “worthy.—For you, who are the *priests* of *Jesus*,
 “see that you preach *his* religion, and his religion
 “only. When you preach think of *him*, not of
 “*yourselves*. Remember *real Christianity* is not an
 “engine of power, a banner of popularity, or a
 “badge of party. It is *religious virtue*. It is *uni-*
 “*versal love*. That virtue, that love, do you in-
 “culcate,

596 *The delusive and bloody Spirit of Popery.*

"culcate, breathe, and practise. Beware of giving
 "ground to say, that the patrons of delusion and
 "tyranny shew more ability, more assiduity, and
 "greater zeal in promoting the *worst* of causes, than
 "you do in promoting the *best*. To make the pious
 "and peaceable honest and loyal, by the united force
 "of your prayers, your instructions, and your exam-
 "ple; be *this* your sovereign pursuit, and *this* your
 "sovereign praise."

END of VOL. I.

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